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JUNE 5, 2000

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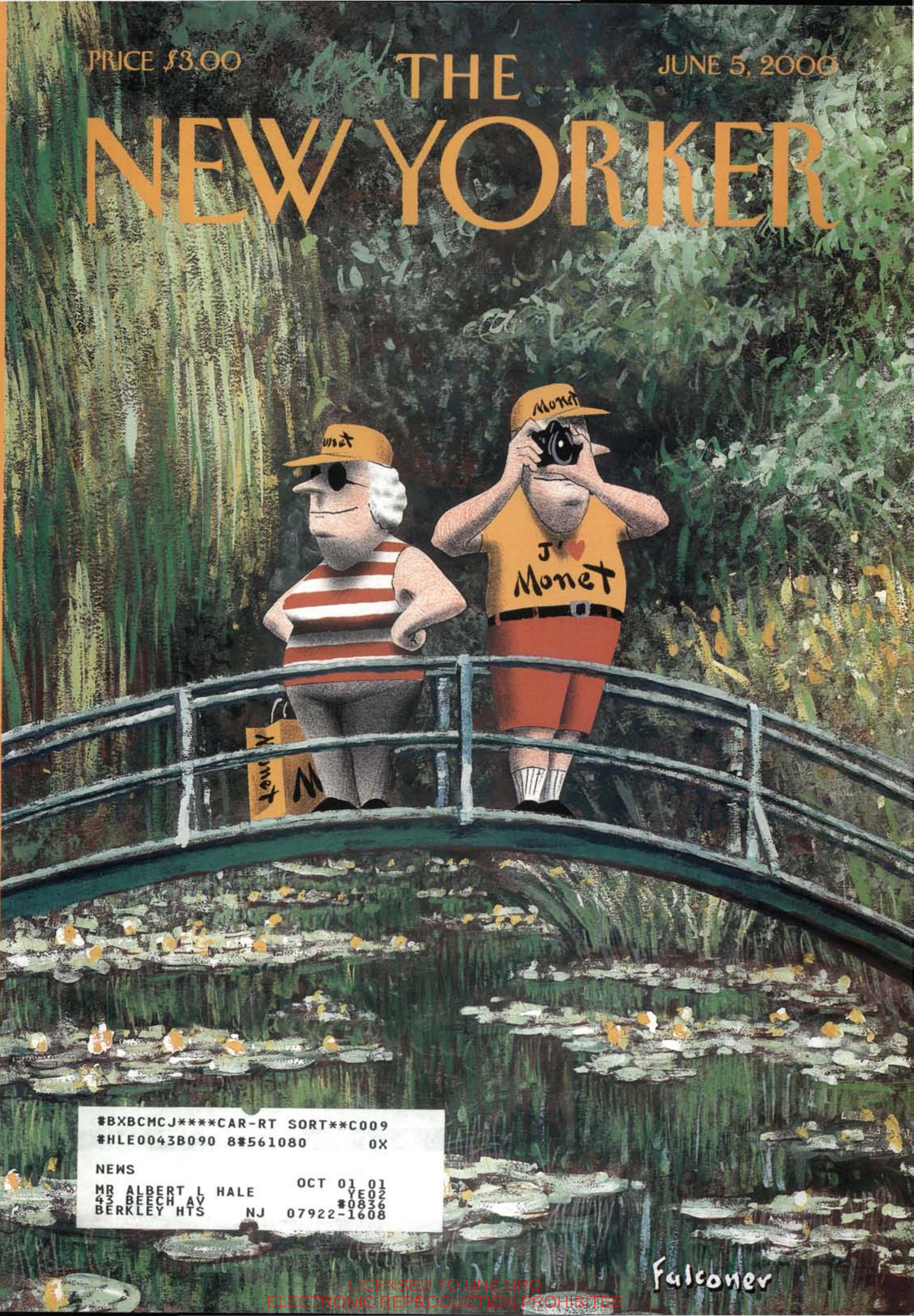
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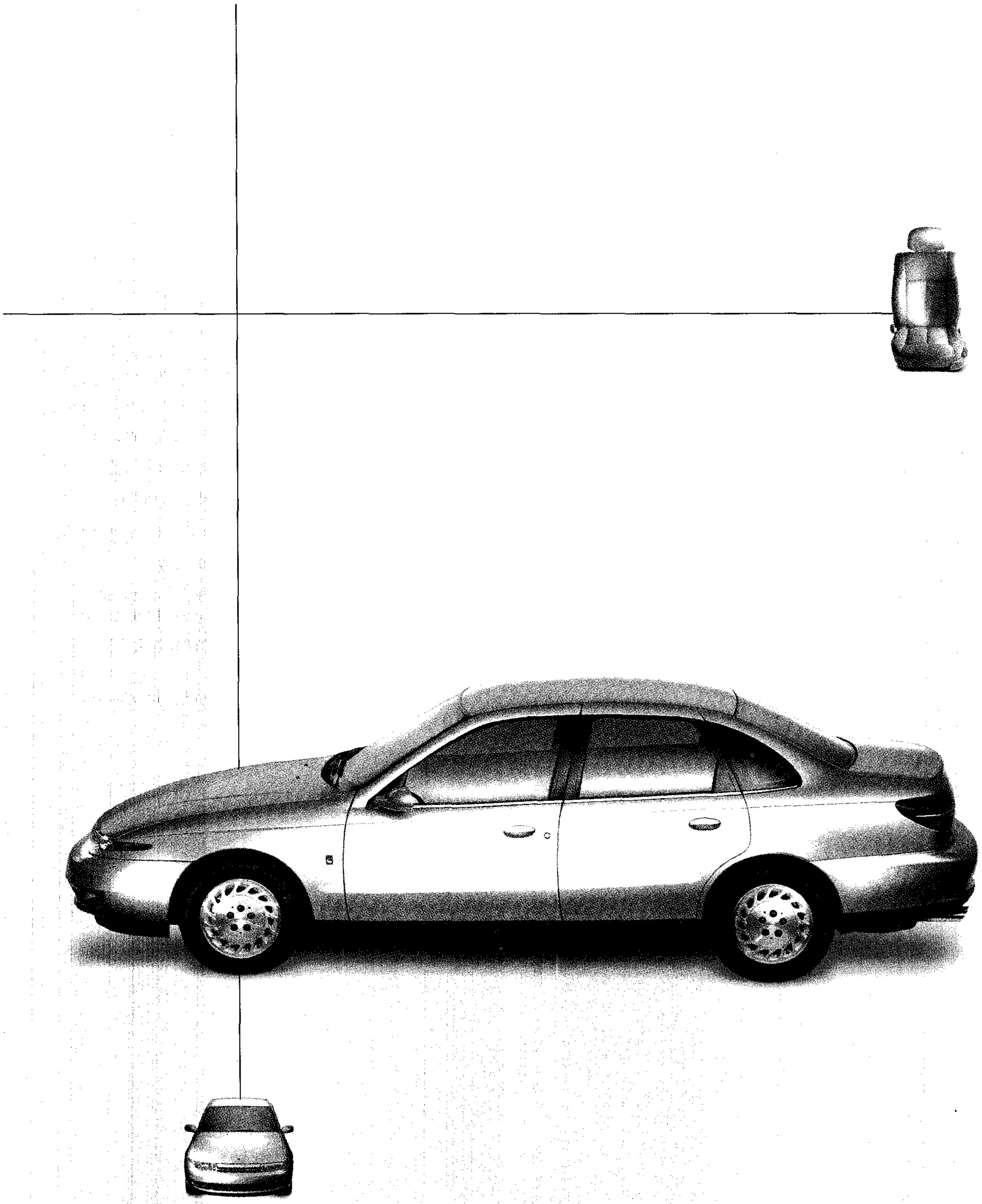

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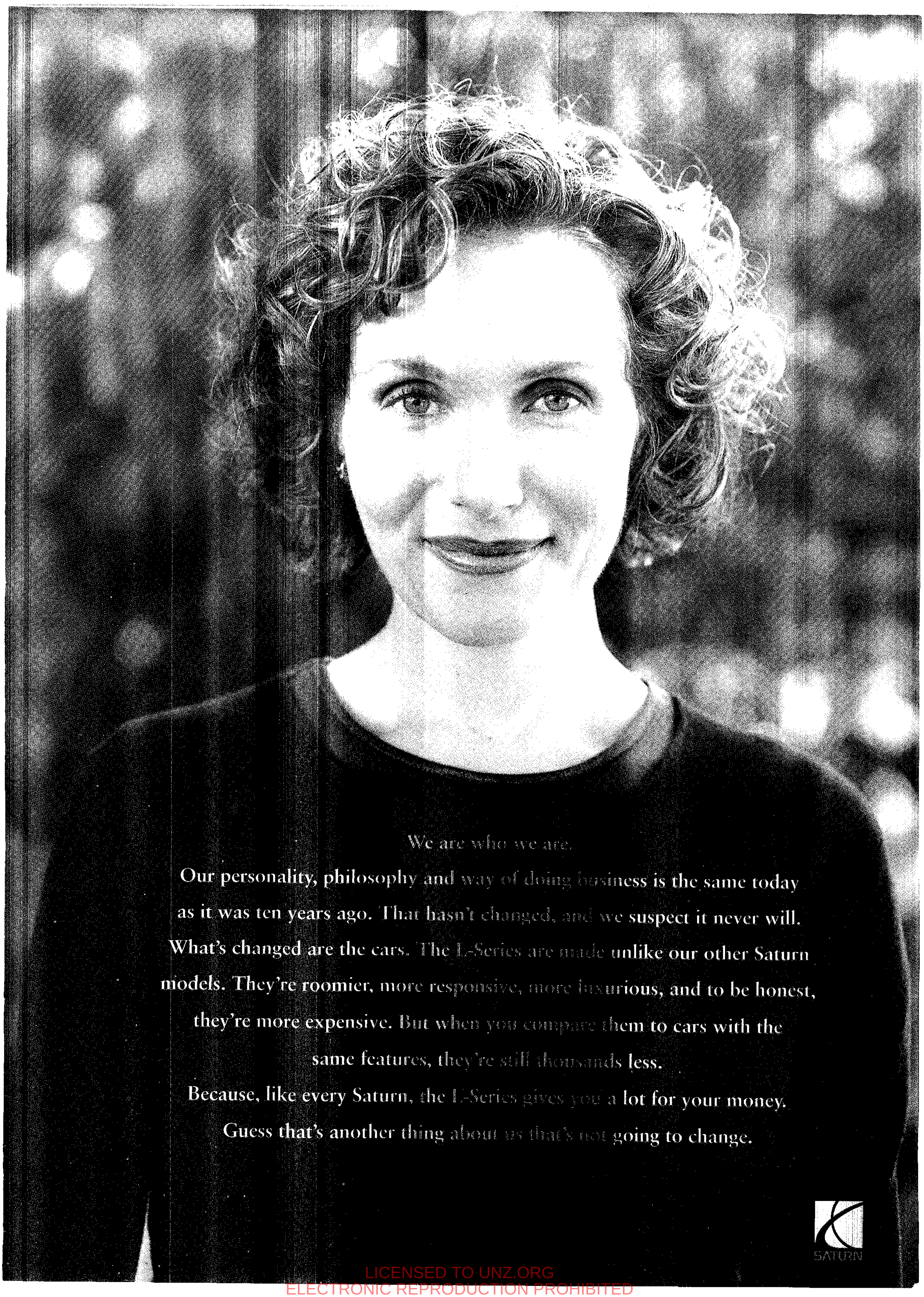

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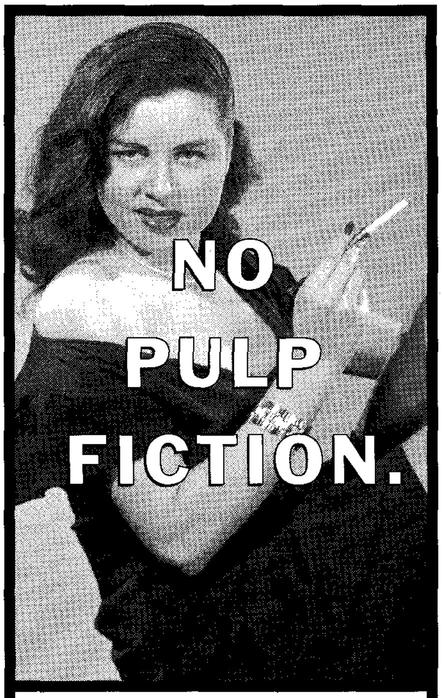

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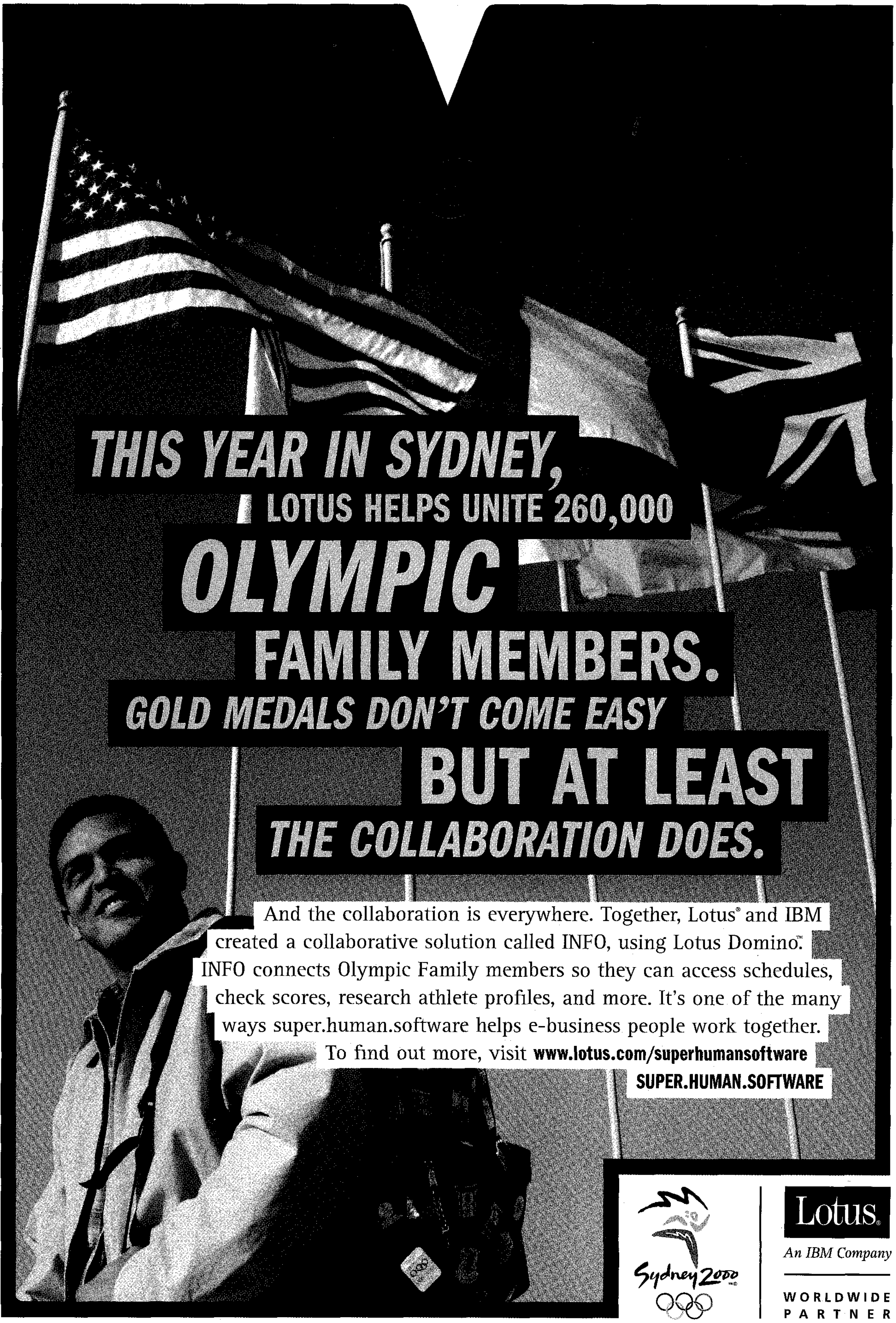

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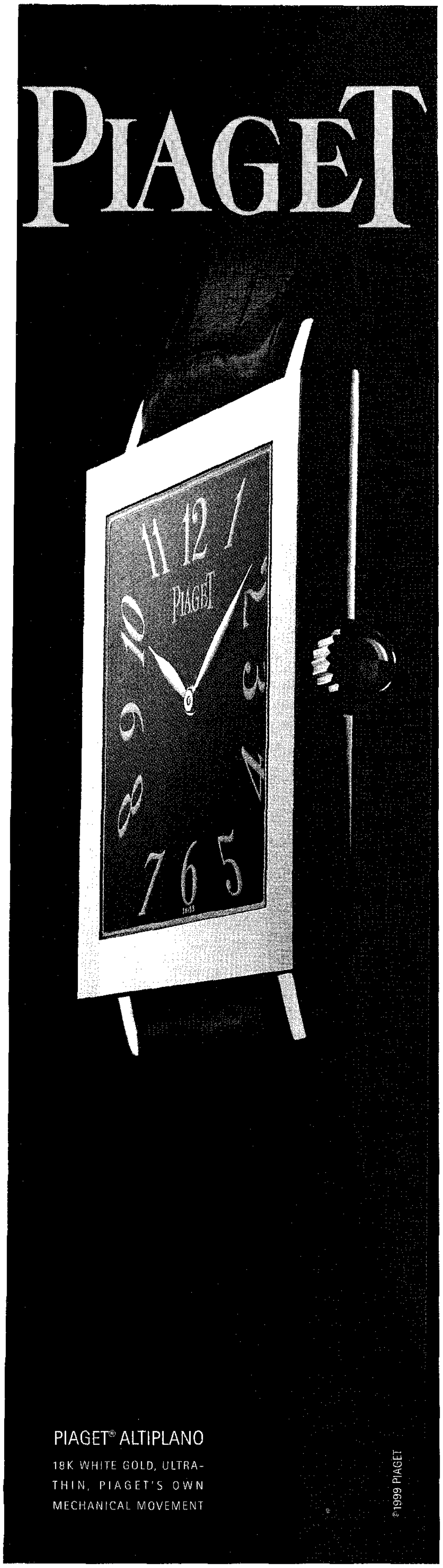
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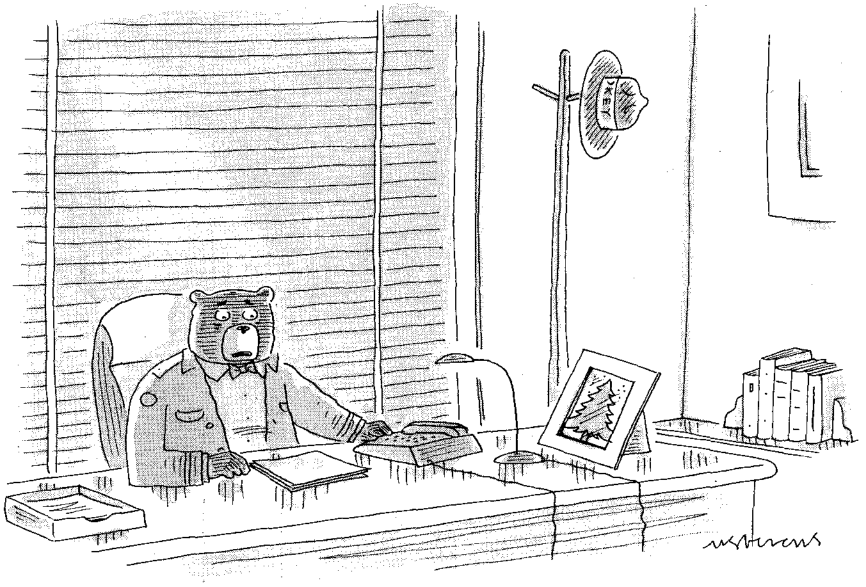

"Hold my calls for a while, Wilson."

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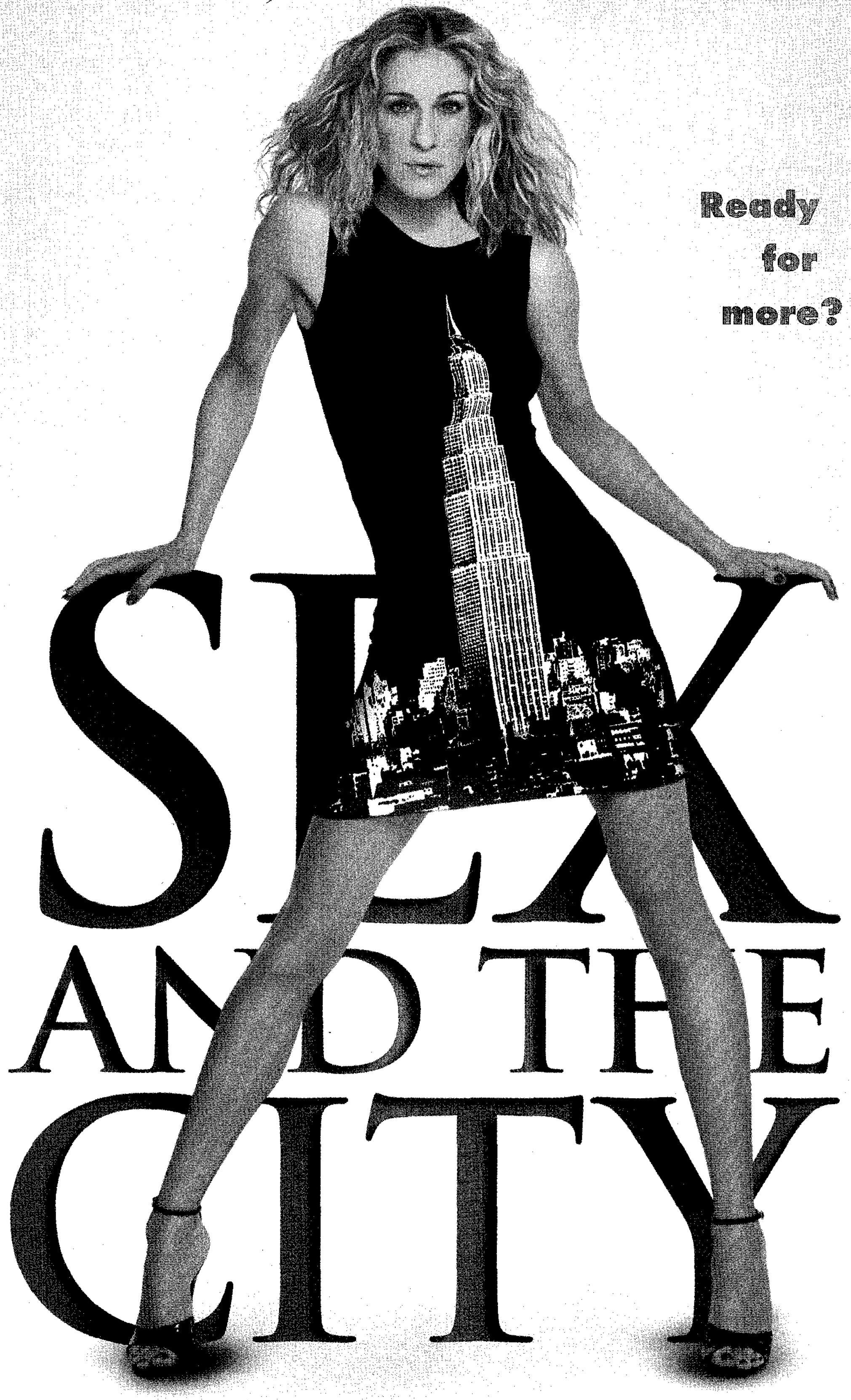

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THE MAIL

AMERICA AT WAR

Seymour M. Hersh's article "Overwhelming Force" (Annals of War, May 22nd) is compelling, but it misleads readers concerning the Battle of Rumaila and the nature of war. The over-all theme is that the 24th Infantry Division unnecessarily and viciously attacked hapless Iraqis who were just trying to get home after a U.S.-declared ceasefire. Readers are led to believe that the rules of war require a certain fairness and civility on the battlefield. That is not the case. Our military wins the nation's wars by never fighting a fair fight. Unlike boxing, in which the referee compels a boxer to go to his corner to give his fallen opponent time to rise from the canvas, war allows no quarter. This tactic is absolutely necessary to protect U.S. soldiers, and is clearly stated in the cornerstone of Army doctrine, Field Manual 100-5:

> Overwhelming combat power is the ability to focus sufficient force to ensure success and deny the enemy any chance of escape or effective retaliation. The enemy is killed, wounded, captured, or not capable of influencing future battlefield events; he is frozen by fear and uncertainty, confused, and isolated. Overwhelming combat power is achieved when all combat elements are violently brought to bear quickly, giving the enemy no opportunity to respond with coordinated or effective opposition.

Overwhelming combat power was the tactic brought to bear by General Barry R. McCaffrey and his 24th Infantry Division at Rumaila. I was there at the battle and was quoted as a source for Hersh's article, so I saw all this firsthand. I have had many years to learn the wisdom of my commanders' actions that day. McCaffrey's response was exactly what every mother and father would demand if their child were among the soldiers being engaged by that retreating, desperate Army.

Accountability is an important aspect of Hersh's article, and yet one party is left completely free from any responsibility for the battle of Rumaila: the Iraqi commanders. Readers are introduced to several examples of Iraqi conscript troops but never to the Republican Guard, the vicious bullies who brutalized Kuwait and instigated the fighting at Rumaila. These weren't innocent soldiers yearning to be free of fighting; these were killers trying to escape the fate they had made for themselves. And these bullies finally learned an important school-yard lesson—sooner or later, you run into someone bigger than yourself. They ran into a group of professionals who dealt them a knock-out punch.

Major David S. Pierson
Würzburg, Germany

As a 1986 graduate of West Point and a 24th Division infantry officer who served in the 2nd Brigade in the Middle East, I sincerely question the justification for some of the horror that the 24th brought upon Iraqi soldiers and innocents after the ceasefire. I am proud to have been a part of one of the greatest advances of mechanized forces in the history of combat, and I know that confusion and miscommunication between units is the hallmark of combat operations, but I'm doubtful that my former unit's continued pummelling of the Iraqis after the ceasefire did much to advance any cause authorized under the United Nations resolutions.

William Duke
Charlotte, N.C.

I lived with the farmers in Hoa Quan and Vinh Thanh, and I saw gunships burst over the tree line, inexplicably machine-gun down farmers at work in their paddies, and fly on. At the officers' club in Can Tho, the gunship pilots wore huge black cowboy hats and affected handlebar mustaches and strutted about like Wyatt Earp. I hated those pilots when I saw them in Can Tho. But I celebrated when they answered my call from a swamp that stank of death, and saved me. If you teach young men to be warriors, if you give them weapons with the power to cut down trees or pulverize buildings or kill a dozen people at the squeeze of a trigger, don't be surprised when some abuse that power: when we elect to go to war, we must know that we will always commit atrocities. This is not meant to justify soldiers who pull the trigger when they don't have to, but we must remember that it is we who send them.

Robert Wetherell
San Diego, Calif.

I'm a 24th Infantry Division Gulf War veteran and a co-author of "The Eyes of Orion," one of the sources Mr. Hersh used. One thing that became clear to me as I read his article is that, while there were charges and countercharges concerning the shooting of Iraqi Army prisoners, there was no massacre similar to that which occurred at My Lai. Even if one believes the most serious charges, any deaths of prisoners were caused by misjudgments and not by malice. As for General McCaffrey's leadership and integrity, I can only say that if I were ever to go to war again I would want to serve in his command.

Neal Creighton
Alpharetta, Ga.

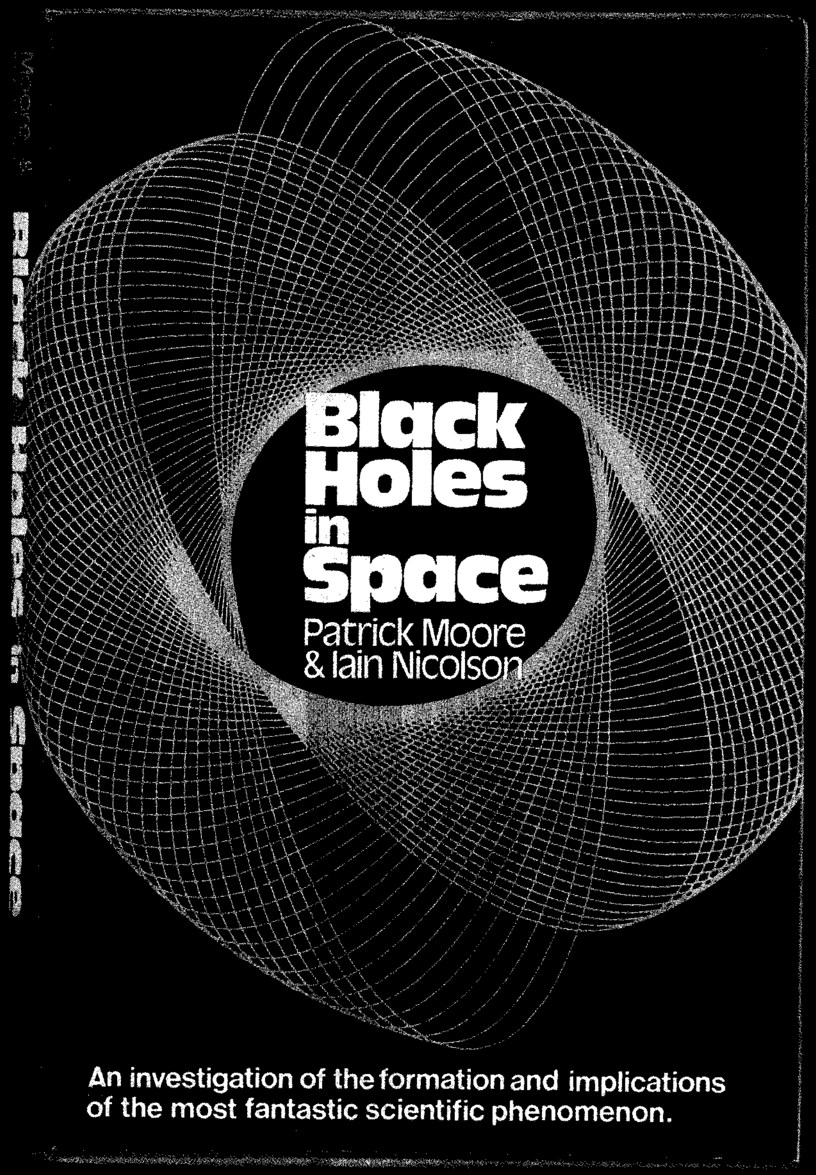
In the course of uncovering General McCaffrey's chilling ruthlessness, Seymour Hersh revealed the honor of many other military men, particularly those like James Manchester and Edward Walker, who had the courage to speak out. This article revives an ancient story, which obviously needs to be told again and again: what happens when public officials are allowed to operate without oversight by, or accountability to, the public. It's hard to know who's to blame here. The Defense Department's imposition of a ban on the media without military escorts is hardly unexpected, but the media's acquiescence, "under protest" or not, is appalling. A bored public, roaring with bully pride over the defeat of the bloodthirsty Middle Eastern hordes, might have been silenced, if not transformed, had journalists done their job during the war.

Dory Hulburt
Minneapolis, Minn.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

July 1, 1980. Sucked from shelf, enters parallel dimension or something.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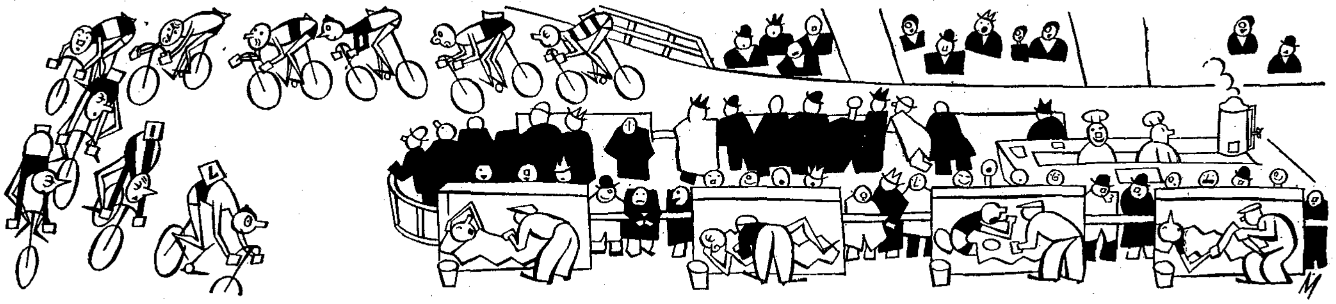

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AND GOD CREATED GREAT WHALES
A composer with a degenerative disease struggles to finish an opera based on "Moby Dick," in a musical-theatre work written by Rinde Eckert and staged by the Foundry Theatre. Previews begin June 1. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077.)

THE BUBBLY BLACK GIRL SHEDS HER CHAMELEON SKIN
A musical memoir by Kirsten Childs, which follows its heroine from Los Angeles in the sixties to New York in the nineties. In previews. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 279-4200.)

CURRENT EVENTS
A liberal California senatorial candidate returns to his Connecticut home, in a new drama by the actor and playwright David Marshall Grant ("Snakebit"). In previews. (Manhattan Theatre Club, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

ENSEMBLE STUDIO THEATRE
The final series in this year's six-week marathon of one-acts begins May 31 at 7:30, with plays by Leslie Caputo, Heather Dundas, Warren Leight, Jeff Reich, and Will Scheffer. The marathon continues through June 11. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-4982.)

THE GINGER MAN
J. P. Donleavy's stage adaptation of his 1955 novel, staged by Ireland's Dublin Theatre Company. In previews. (Irish Arts Center, 553 W. 51st St. 581-4125.)

GOD WILLING
A wake in Boston is the setting for this Irish family drama, written by David McLaughlin. Previews May 31-June 4. Opens June 6 at 8. (Pantheon Theatre, 303 W. 42nd St. 545-3767.)

HOTEL SUITE
Helen Carey, Randy Graff, Leigh Lawson, and Ron Orbach star in an evening of one-acts taken from Neil Simon's three "Suite" plays. John Tillinger is the director. In previews. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

NIGHT OF THE ASSASSINS
The Cuban playwright José Triana's 1965 drama, in which three siblings act out the murder of their parents. In previews. (INTAR 53, at 508 W. 53rd St. 279-4200.)

PUSS
Ludwig Tieck's 1797 stage version of the Puss-in-Boots story gets a modern adaptation, written and directed by Richard Kimmel, which incorporates dance, video, and live music. In previews. (Performing Garage, 33 Wooster St. 479-8411.)

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ROMEO AND JULIET
The Moonwork Theatre Company's version of Shakespeare's play. Previews begin June 1. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 279-4200.)

STRAIGHT-JACKET
A nineteen-fifties Hollywood actor marries a studio owner's secretary in order to conceal his homosexuality, in a comedy by Richard Day. In previews. (Playhouse 91, at 316 E. 91st St. 307-4100.)

OPENED RECENTLY

ACHE
A hundred and thirty-nine explicit, post-breakup poems by the novelist Blake Nelson, adapted for the stage. (The Flea, 41 White St., between Broadway and Church St. 226-0051. Closes June 10.)

AIDA
Disney's new musical—five years in the making and a product of Pharaonic expense—is, if not perfect, a lively, polished entertainment with bursts of joyful flamboyance worthy of its composer, Elton John. The two female leads—Heather Headley, as Aida, and Sherie René Scott, as Amneris—shine in their different ways, and Bob Crowley's brilliant sets give the show both visual dazzle and emotional resonance. Directed by Robert Falls. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/00.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

AMADEUS
From London, a revival of Peter Shaffer's drama, starring Michael Sheen as Mozart and David Suchet as Salieri. Sir Peter Hall is the director. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

ANONYMOUS
Chip Zien has the lead in a comedy by Glen Merzer, about a cloistered novelist whose life is turned upside-down when he takes a job in advertising. (McGinn/Cazale, Broadway at 76th St. 279-4200.)

THE BOMB-ITTY OF ERRORS
In this exuberant take on "The Comedy of Errors," the action has been shifted to a hip-hop realm, and the basic ideas remain the same, but the four extravagantly talented writer-actors (who play all of the parts) make it seem altogether new. (45 Bleecker, 45 Bleecker St., at Lafayette St. 307-4100.)

CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (10/18 & 10/25/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

COPENHAGEN
In Michael Frayn's play, which speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty)—the game of not knowing is elevated to an organizing principle. It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

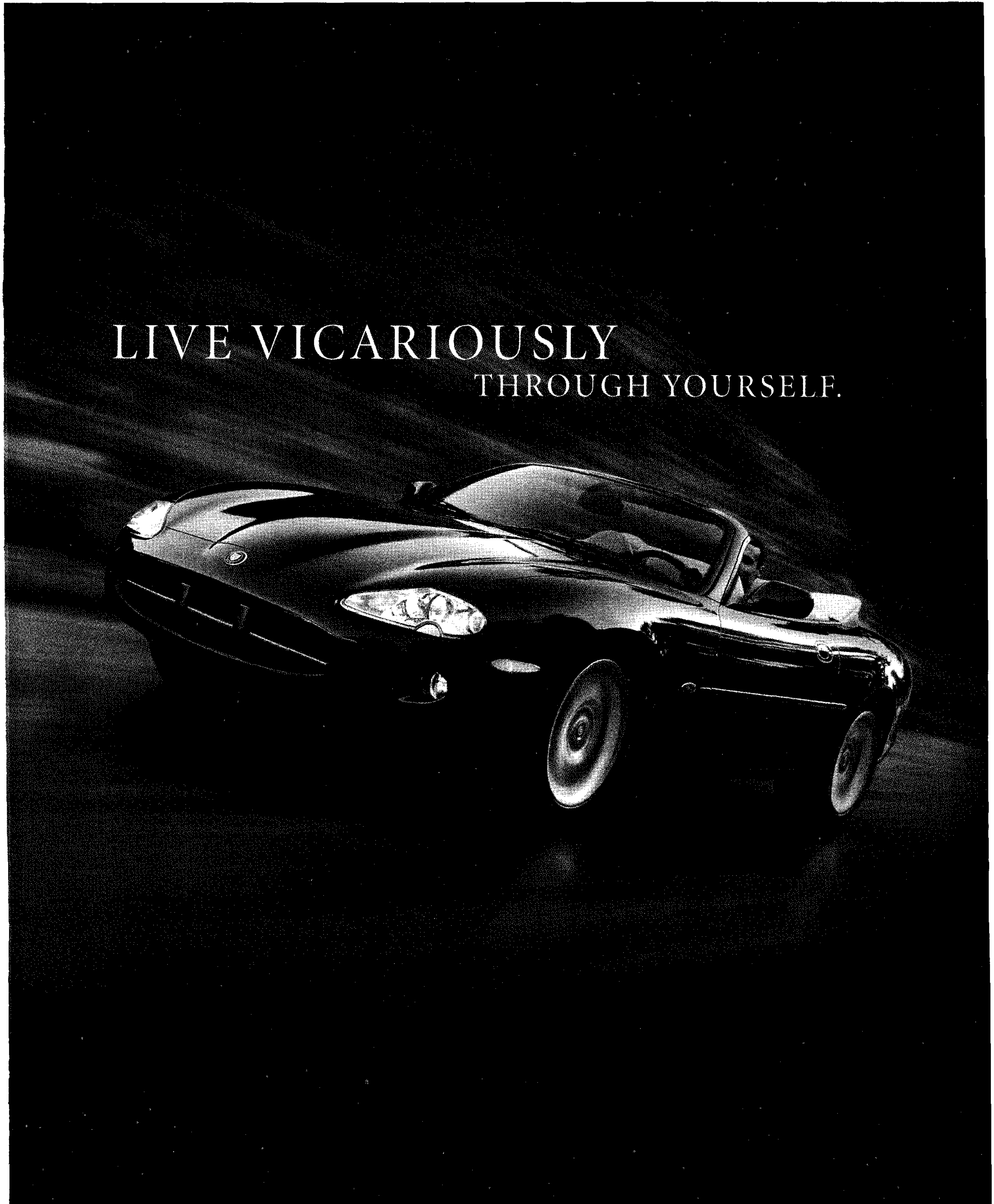
THE DESIGNATED MOURNER
Wallace Shawn, Deborah Eisenberg, and Larry Pine make up the cast in Mr. Shawn's 1996 play, directed by André Gregory. (5/15/00) (21 South William Street. 532-8887.)

THE DIRECTOR
The playwright Nancy Hasty asks whether acting (which is essentially lying) can reveal deeper truth. It's a smart play, and, though it's not entirely satisfying intellectually, John Shea's brilliant performance as the director almost makes it seem so. (Arclight, 152 W. 71st St. 279-4200.)

DIRTY BLONDE
Mae West's flirty and dirty persona is the subject of a cunningly written, raffish evening entitled "Dirty Blonde," conceived by the writer-actress Claudia Shear and the director James Lapine. Mae's story is recounted with brio by two fans—Jo (Claudia Shear, who doubles winningly as Mae) and Charlie (the superb Kevin Chamberlin). The success of the play rests not on the louche facts of West's life, but on the intersection of her story with the sweetness of the evolving relationship between the two lost souls who narrate it. In the delicate cross-hatching of the public and the private realms, brilliantly engineered by Lapine, "Dirty Blonde" dramatizes how a public persona is both constructed and internalized by its intended audience. (2/7/00) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

DREAMBOATS AND SLEEPYHEADS: LULLABY OF THE LOST
In Charles Allcroft's fantasy play, two insomniacs enter a celestial world of nighttime spirits. (La Mama, 74A E. 4th St. 475-7710. Closes June 4.)

ENTER THE GUARDSMAN
A musical romance based on Ferenc Molnar's "The Guardsman," starring Robert Cuccioli, Marla Schaffel, and Mark Jacoby. (Vineyard Theatre, 108 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)



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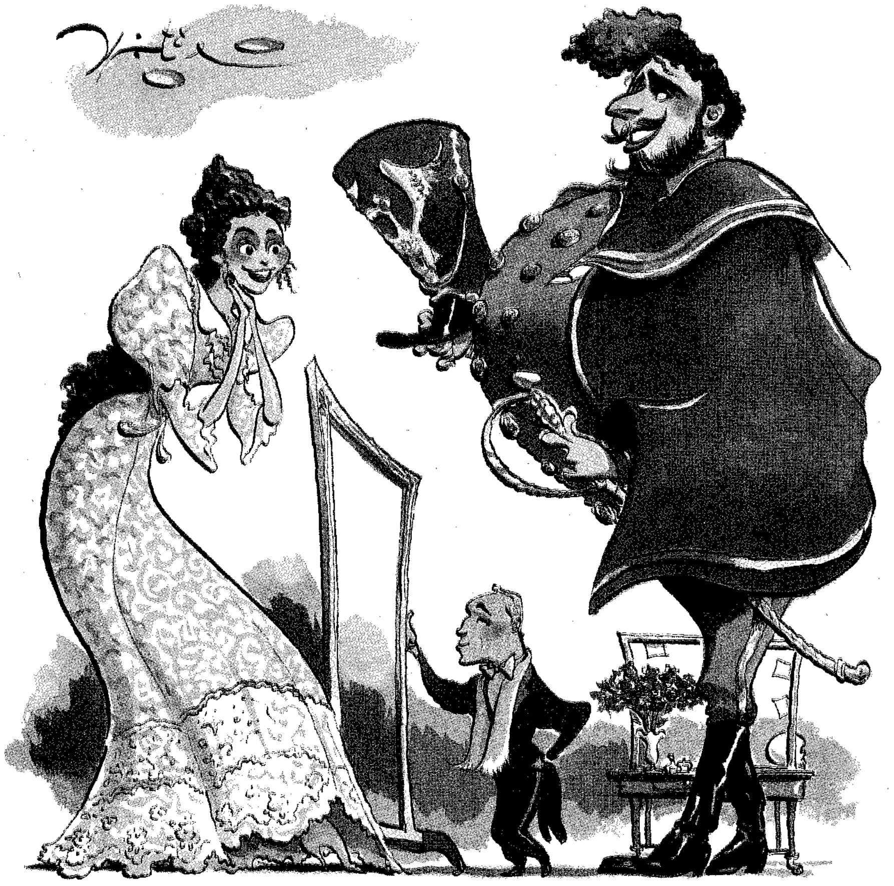
THE GREEN BIRD
The director Julie Taymor brings Carlo Gozzi's fairy tale to the stage with puppets, masks, and live performers. The music is by Elliot Goldenthal. (Cort, 138 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

HYPATIA
In Mac Wellman's latest play, the fifth-century mathematician and philosopher travels through time bearing gifts. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 334-0962. Closes June 3.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
This misguided Broadway revival of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1971 musical version of the Saviour's last days on earth starts out by asking the tantalizing question "What's the buzz?" but never delivers a theatrically satisfying answer. Still, with its archaic whiff of right-wing outrage and singable seventies-rock score, it's fun for nostalgia's sake. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)


"Enter the Guardsman," by Scott Wentworth, Craig Bohmler, and Marion Adler.

MICHAEL WITTE

JITNEY
August Wilson's first play, set in 1977, about the lives of a group of Pittsburgh gypsy-cab drivers. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

KISS ME, KATE
With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE LARAMIE PROJECT
A drama about the murder of gay-hate victim Matthew Shepard, written and directed by Moisés Kaufman ("Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde"). (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

LUCRECE
From the Willow Cabin Theatre Company, Thornton Wilder's 1932 translation of "Le Viol de Lucrece," by André Obey. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 886-1889. Closes June 4.)

LYDIE BREEZE
John Guare has rewritten his two 1982 plays, "Lydie Breeze" and "Gardenia," as a drama in two parts, presented in rotating repertory. (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475.)

A MOON FOR THE MISBEGOTTEN
A solid and satisfying revival of Eugene O'Neill's 1943 drama. Gabriel Byrne's performance, as James Tyrone, an alcoholic actor who returns to his Connecticut farm from New York to unburden himself in the arms of the earth mother Josie (Cherry Jones), is something to see. Daniel Sullivan directed. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

THE MUSIC MAN
The first thing that has to be said about this delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, which is under the direction of Susan Stroman, is that it has magnificently solved the Robert Preston Problem in the person of Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill—the role that Preston, of course, immortalized in the original show and in the 1962 movie. Bierko talks and moves and sings with great confidence and charm, and he has the weight and presence on the stage that we associate with male musical stars of several decades ago. Bierko and Rebecca Luker, as Marion, the librarian, make a terrific couple, and Luker's sweet, warbly voice is just right for the era of parlor songs, in which the musical is set. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

OUR LADY OF SLIGO
Sinéad Cusack has the leading role in Sebastian Barry's latest drama, under the direction of Max Stafford-Clark. (5/8/00) (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes June 4.)

THE PENIS RESPONDS
Twelve short plays by Ernest Thompson, who co-stars with Richard Gilliland. (Blue Heron, 123 E. 24th St. 279-4200.)

PROOF
Mary-Louise Parker stars in a drama by David Auburn, about an enigmatic woman, her genius father, and a mysterious math proof. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

THE REAL THING
Before the young British playwright Patrick Marber's drama about the excruciating machinations of coupledom, "Closer" (1997), there was this one by the seasoned British playwright Tom Stoppard, in 1984; in comparison, Stoppard's take seems surprisingly innocent. But revived here with an excellent cast (especially Stephen Dillane) and subtle direction by David Leveaux, the elder playwright's most accessible work remains the wittiest, sharpest look at that twisted thing called love to come around in decades. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RIDE DOWN MT. MORGAN
"Why have I been condemned?" the aptly named bigamist Lyman Felt (Patrick Stewart) asks, rather whinily, toward the end of Arthur Miller's latest play, an examination of the seeming impossibility of fidelity, or, at least, lifelong marriage. And you trust that Lyman is truly in the dark about how he could be convicted of having love for two women—the childlike but uptight and aging Wasp he first married (the wonderful Frances Conroy) and a sexy, sophisticated, but oblivious young Jew (Katy Selverstone). The problem with Miller's project is that his lying Lyman is no longer in love with his first wife at all, and he seems to have only lust for the second. In the end, it makes a really good case for divorce. David Esbjornson directed. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
John Travolta is not easy to replace, nor are the ashes of disco fever likely to reignite, as this show, based on the 1977 movie, demonstrates. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SMALL CRAFT WARNINGS
In this very late Tennessee Williams drama, the Southern gilding has completely worn off his writing; the result is blunter and less poignant than his classics, and it carries an undertow of exhaustion, but in the end it stays with you. It's 1968 in a low-rent bar in Southern California; the clientele includes a hippie girl, an unlicensed doctor, and a beautician who talks endlessly about her dead gay brother and her independence. There's not much action, but the characters deftly transport Williams's familiar concerns to this unfamiliar setting, where they're unexpectedly resonant. Michael Cannis, as the bartender, and Cristine McMurdo-Wallis, as the beautician, are particularly strong among a fine cast. (Tribeca Playhouse, 111 Reade St. 532-8887.)

SWING!
No plot, just a hot band, Olympic-class dancers, and major panties—this show, a tribute to swing and its dance counterpart, the Lindy (mother of the jitterbug), lives up to its name. It swings. Directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

TALLER THAN A DWARF
From the pen of Elaine May, a new comedy starring Matthew Broderick and Parker Posey and directed by Alan Arkin. (Longacre, 220 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST
A sensational revival of Sam Shepard's 1980 play, directed by Matthew Warchus. It's a droll tall tale of sibling rivalry, in which an intrusive, beer-swilling outlaw named Lee and his brother, Austin, a put-upon Ivy League screenwriter, face off in their vacationing mother's tidy modern kitchen. John C. Reilly's roaring, as Lee, and Philip Seymour Hoffman's repressed hostility, as Austin, make for a wonderful contrast and a satisfyingly equal battle of wills, but when the actors switch roles (every few performances), Hoffman's derelict eyes, slurred sea-dog voice, and preternatural comic skills make the contest entertaining but lopsided. (3/27/00) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

UNCLE VANYA
The director Michael Mayer's thrilling production of Chekhov's coruscating play, featuring Derek Jacobi, Roger Rees, Brian Murray, and Laura Linney. Mike Poulton's superb translation is at once crisp,

witty, and actable, and the vastness of the characters' loss and the folly of their capacity for denial come sensationally into focus. (5/8/00) (Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 719-1300.)

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE COFFEE
In Eric Bogosian's new one-man performance, his first in six years, he portrays the usual lineup of self-deluded characters and armchair terrorists, who throw emotionally destructive grenades—which sometimes blow up in their faces while also damaging everyone around them. Bogosian's eye is still sharp; what he sees, he sees clearly. But he doesn't seem to see as much as he used to. Many of his observations on the American way of life seem a little dated, and too much of the coffee he's serving in this show tastes reheated. (5/22/00) (Jane Street Theatre, Hotel Riverview Ballroom, 113 Jane St. 239-6200. Closes June 11.)

WHEN THEY SPEAK OF RITA
Daisy B. Foote's drama, about a discontented housewife in rural New Hampshire. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes June 25.)

THE WILD PARTY
George C. Wolfe and Michael John LaChiusa's musical version of Joseph Moncure March's blunt, sour, vicious little Jazz Age poem—about an orgy thrown by a lubricious vaudeville hoofer and the brutal comedian with whom she lives—wears its decadence and its sense of soiled collapse like a badge. The enormous energy that comes across the footlights feels more like theatrical hyperventilation than revelation. And Michael John LaChiusa's thirty-song score, unfortunately, has not one memorable melody. Mandy Patinkin, Eartha Kitt, and Toni Collette stand out in the cast. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES
Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370.

CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DAME EDNA: THE ROYAL TOUR
Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave., at 14th St. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

FULLY COMMITTED
Cherry Lane Theatre, 38 Commerce St. 239-6200.

JACKIE MASON: MUCH ADO ABOUT EVERYTHING
Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.

OVER THE RIVER AND THROUGH THE WOODS
John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.

PERFECT CRIME
Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401.

RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.

THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

NEW YORK CITY BALLET
May 31 at 8: "Brahms-Schoenberg Quartet," "Sonatas and Interludes," "Le Tombeau de Couperin," and "Glass Pieces." ♦ June 1 at 8: "Agon"; the première of "Swerve Poems," choreographed by Kevin O'Day; and "I'm Old Fashioned." ♦ June 2 at 8: "Swerve Poems," "Davidsbündlertänze," and "Symphony in C." ♦ June 3 at 2: "Tchaikovsky Pi-

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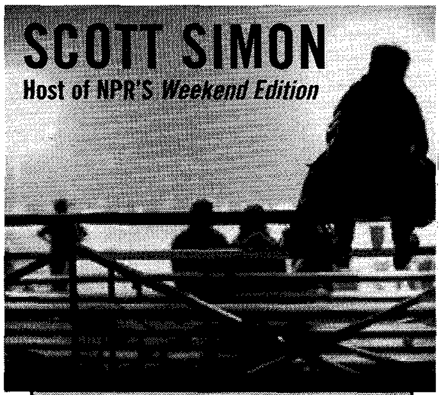
Host of NPR'S *Weekend Edition*



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ano Concerto No. 2,” “The Steadfast Tin Soldier,” “Le Tombeau de Couperin,” and “Davidsbündlertänze.” ♦ June 3 at 8 and June 4 at 3: “Coppélia.” ♦ June 6 at 8: “2 & 3 Part Inventions,” “Summerspace,” and “Symphony in C.” (New York State Theatre. 870-5570. Through June 25.)

AMERICAN BALLET THEATRE
May 31 at 2 and 8 and June 1 at 8: “Romeo and Juliet.” ♦ June 2 and June 5-6 at 8 and June 3 at 2 and 8: “Le Corsaire.” (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000. Through July 1.)

JENNIFER MULLER/THE WORKS
For its twenty-fifth-anniversary season, the company performs four premières, including “Beethoven—Not Four Naught,” set to the composer's String Quartet in B-Flat Major (Op. 18, No. 6), and two revivals, “Interrupted River” and “Winter Pieces.” (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. May 30 and June 1-3 at 8, May 31 at 7:30, and June 4 at 2 and 7:30.)

DANCE AFRICA 2000: CULTURAL CONNECTIONS
The annual festival of African and African-American dance presents Génies Noires, who perform the traditional dance of Benin. Rennie Harris Pure-Movement, a company that gives an African twist to Philly-style hip-hop, the young dancers from BAM's Restoration DanceAfrica Ensemble, and Djoulé African, which blends West African, Afro-Caribbean, and African-American styles, complete the program. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. June 2 at 7:30, June 3 at 2 and 7:30, and June 4 at 3.)

NEW FACES/NEW VOICES/NEW VISIONS
The dance portion of the annual performance showcase features a split bill devoted to veteran choreographers and “New Faces” alums Ronald K. Brown and Marlies Yearby (June 3) and a tasting menu dedicated to works by promising choreographic talents, including Christalyn E. Wright and Israel Martinez (June 4). (Davis Hall, City College, Convent Ave. at 134th St. 650-7289. June 3 at 7:30 and June 4 at 2 and 5.)

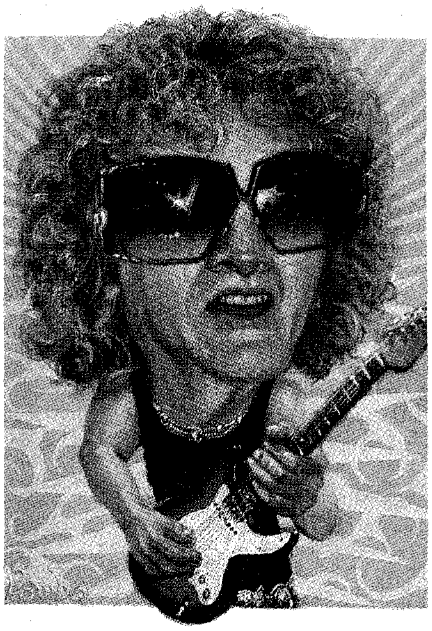
JOHN JASPERSE COMPANY
The choreographer presents the première of the quartet “Ft. Blossom” and the revival of his 1995 work “Excessories.” (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 255-5793. May 31-June 3 at 8.)

"WANDERING"
The solo performer Yoshiko Takeshige presents her updated version of Noh dance, a four-part work set to the music of Kitaro and Martin Sze. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. June 3 at 7:30.)

DANCES PATRELLE
The company, under the direction of Francis Patrelle, performs four works, including the première of “Notturno for Strings and Harp,” set to a score by Irving Fine. (Theatre of the Riverside Church, W. 120th St. and Riverside Dr. 870-6784. June 1-2 at 7:30 and June 3-4 at 2 and 7:30.)

"DUENDE FLAMENCO"
The World Music Institute presents two nights of Spanish dance. June 2 at 8: Manuel Soler Company. ♦ June 3 at 8: Carmen Cortes Company. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.)

"I, RASPUTIN"
The choreographer Kriota Willberg, the writer Todd Alcott, and the designer R. Sikoryak team up to present the story of the Russian monk as a tale of debauchery and spirituality, which they convey via Russian folk dance, slide projections, stage combat, etiquette manuals, and other unconventional means. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. June 1-4 at 7:30. Through June 11.)



SHADY CHARACTER *One of the great rock bands of the nineteen-seventies, Mott the Hoople is remembered mostly for the David Bowie–penned “All the Young Dudes,” a fine song that only hints at the group's depth and power. Ian Hunter was Mott's front man and chief songwriter, and, while he hasn't had a hit Stateside in decades, he has been responsible for more than his share of classic-rock moments, including “Once Bitten, Twice Shy.” American concerts by Hunter and his everpresent sunglasses are rare indeed; those who don't know his music are hereby encouraged to attend the Bowery Ballroom show (see Clubs) and shout out requests for the early-eighties chestnut “All of the Good Ones Are Taken.”*

POMBO

NIGHT LIFE
CONCERTS

BELL ATLANTIC JAZZ FESTIVAL
Ornette Coleman, jazz's perennial iconoclast, kicks off the festival with a musical triptych. Over the course of the evening, his group grows from a trio (in which he is backed by longtime sidemen Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins) to a septet (which features Indian and African players, including tabla virtuoso Badal Roy) to the twenty-piece Harmolodic Chamber Ensemble (which presents Coleman's new “Freedom Symbol Composition”). In other words, something for everyone, and then some. (The Lawn at Battery Park. June 1 at 6:30.) ♦ In what promises to be an evening of grand lyricism, bassist Charlie Haden will augment his excellent Quartet West with a string orchestra and singer Bill Henderson, who enlivened Haden's 1999 album, “Art of the Song.” (Angel Orensanz Foundation, 172 Norfolk St. June 2 at 8.) ♦ A beautiful free concert features a duet between bassist Ron Carter and drummer Joey Baron, the shattering poetry of power saxophonist David S. Ware's quartet, and a rare meeting between drummer Max Roach and pianist Cecil Taylor, two jazz geniuses from different generations who, mainly through Roach's unfettered imagination and all-encompassing technique, find ways to creatively converse. (Columbia University Steps, Broadway at 116th St. June 4 at 6.) See also Jazz and Standards. For more information about the festival, call 877-422-3378.

THE FUNKY METERS / ME'SHELL NDEGÉOCELLO
A hip-shaking evening featuring the New Orleans funk legends and the iconoclastic, bass-playing wunderkind. (The Lawn at Battery Park. 877-422-3378. June 2 at 6:30.)

STEREOLAB / YOKO ONO, THURSTON MOORE, AND DJ SPOOKY
In what may prove to be one of the odder bills in recent memory, the delightful Moog-driven London outfit shares the stage with a trio comprised of the inimitable howling banshee (whose recent performances have featured a killer band), the guitar-torturing leader of Sonic Youth, and the ambient disk jockey. (The Lawn at Battery Park. 877-422-3378. June 3 at 5.)

DR. JOHN / GALACTIC
Dr. John, the great New Orleans pianist, singer, and musical repository, is as susceptible to the charms of Duke Ellington's music as the rest of us. Dr. John, however, can transform his passion into music; his new CD, "Duke Elegant," gives some of the Maestro's compositions the gumbo treatment. The Big Easy's Galactic, which is fronted by the charismatic vocalist Theryl (the Houseman) de Clouet, serves up hot and spicy funk. With Ballin' the Jack, the ensemble led by the broad-minded reeds player Matt Darriau which explores Duke Ellington's early "jungle" repertoire. (Rumsey Playfield, Central Park, mid-Park at 72nd St. 877-422-3378. June 6 at 6:30.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—June 1: Guitarist **Chris Whitley.** With the quartet **Johnny Society,** which churns out nifty little pop songs led by singer and songwriter Kenny Siegal, who delivers each line with raw intensity. June 2: **Ian Hunter.** June 3: The dark ballads of **Bonny Prince Billy.**

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—June 2: **Bicycle,** a band led by the singer-songwriter Kurt Liebert, takes its name seriously: it's currently on a tour from Portland, Maine, to Washington, D.C., travelling from gig to gig on bikes. Its music is just as much fun, and nearly as wacky. On its self-titled début album, Liebert writes quick and clever songs with catchy hooks and a touch of Beckian irreverence. If only all underground pop musicians could be as creative. June 3: **Spottiswoode and His Enemies.** Jonathan Spottiswoode, the backbone of this tight sextet, writes astringently morose ballads about love, and his deep, rough-hewn voice will make you think of Leonard Cohen.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—June 2-3: The **Loser's Lounge** pays playful homage to the music of the Electric Light Orchestra. June 5: Though she was unceremoniously dropped from her major-label record deal, the Boston-born post-folkie **Jonatha Brooke** makes Jewel seem like a beginner. Her latest CD, "Jonatha Brooke Live," is a charmer, but she's even better in the flesh. The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

GALAPAGOS
70 North 6th St., Williamsburg (718-782-5188)—**Drums and Tuba,** a highly infectious trio drops by on June 2. The band—tuba, drums, and guitar—laces its loop-filled songs with New Orleans-style grooves and some progressive-rock guitar heroics. The result is long, intricate, and often hypnotic soundscapes that build and build until the magic of the tuba and the ferocious, trancelike drumming become pleasantly overwhelming. Sharing the bill is the **Faun Fables.** The brainchild of the extraordinary Oakland-based singer and yodeler Dawn McCarthy, who performs eerie, Appalachian-tinged confessionals marked by spellbinding honesty. One of the most gifted singers performing today, McCarthy suggests what the next world might sound like. She's joined by her multitalented musical partner Nils Frykdahl, who'll play flute and guitar. With the evolving accordion-driven Continental punk of Brooklyn's **Barbez.** June 6: **Rachel's,** a Louisville collective specializing in lushly orchestrated atmospheric pop, strips itself down to its core elements—piano, viola, and cello—and offers a rare performance of its inspired second album, "Music for Egon Schiele," in its entirety.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—June 1-2: **Yo La Tengo,** the best thing to come out of Hoboken since Francis Albert Sinatra. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—June 1-3: Former Squirrel Nut Zippers guitarist **Tom Maxwell.** June 6: In what promises to be one of the hottest shows of the season, guitarist **Corey Harris** joins the fiery, blind New Orleans pianist **Henry Butler** to perform songs from their captivating new album of Crescent City blues, "Vü Dü Menz."

SHINE
285 West Broadway, at Canal St. (941-0900)—Giant Step, a local record label and concert-promoting outfit that grew out of its eponymous roving dance parties of the early nineties, returns to its roots with a weekly party here on Mondays. House-music d.j. **Ron Trent** is the regular man on the turntables, but June 5 features music from the perfect summer soundtrack album, the recently released compilation "Bossa Mundo . . . When Brazil Meets the World," with singer **Salomé de Bahia** and d.j.s **François K, DJ Yellow,** and **MKL,** all of whom contributed to the record.

S.O.B.'S
204 Varick St., at W. Houston St. (243-4940)—May 31: The members of **Israel Vibration** first met as children in Jamaica's Mon Rehabilitation Center, where they were being treated for polio. They became friends through their shared love of roots reggae, and started a band. More than two decades later, they have become one of the more inspiring reggae acts around, not because they take the stage supported by crutches (which they do) but because they harmonize about Rastafarianism and social ills with overwhelming emotion. June 4: **Del tha Funky Homosapien,** who for many years was known primarily as Ice Cube's cousin, has always been a talented performer in his own right, and his latest album, "Both Sides of the Brain," proves it: the raps are loose and funny, and the music tight and funky. The jazzy San Francisco-based hip-hop outfit **Blackalicious** has been one of the genre's best-kept secrets since the mid-nineties. With **MC Paul Barman.** A recent Brown graduate, Barman is way ahead of the rap game. In fact he's playing his own game, although with some help from Prince Paul, who produced Barman's "It's Very Stimulating," on which the rapper stretches his bachelor's-degree lyrics to rhyme "booty" with "Susan Faludi" and "fructose" with "Chuck Close." June 6: R. & B. crooner **Carl Thomas.** Dining.

WETLANDS
161 Hudson St. (966-4225)—June 1: For twenty years now the **Legendary Pink Dots** have been whipping up a strange concoction of progressive rock and Dungeons and Dragons-style mythology.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BIRDLAND
315 W. 44th St. (581-3080)—May 31: A sterling drummer who was one of the unsung journeymen of the sixties, **Charlie Persip** played to great effect with everyone from Eric Dolphy to Dizzy Gillespie. He's still going strong, still leading his exuberant Superband. Dining.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through June 4: **Pat Martino,** a world-class guitarist who likes to stay on the contemporary tip, leads his Hip Bop band, featuring **Larry Goldings,** himself an up-to-date keyboardist with funky leanings. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

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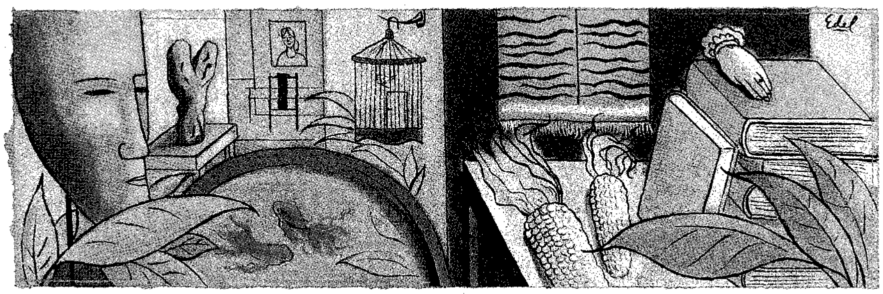
ON AND OFF THE AVENUE

Satisfy Your Curiosity

Overwhelming impressions to the contrary, chain stores and E-commerce sites have not entirely vanquished Manhattan's retail spirit: the city continues to boast a number of out-of-the-way venues whose owners are less merchants than curators, plucking goods from far-flung flea markets and ateliers and turning ordinary storefronts into modern versions of Dickensian curiosity shops.



EDEL RODRIGUEZ

The partners who run the wildly varied four rooms that comprise **DIMSON HOMMA** (20 E. 67th St.; 439-7950) trip lightly across centuries and continents in search of rare finds. Amid the Tibetan rugs, first-edition books, antique toys, and other singular items are tiny bejewelled brass hands meant to serve as bookmarks ($70 to $150), available only here and in Paris at a *librairie* on the Rue Jacob. Bottles excavated from the five boroughs of New York ($60 to $400) share shelf space with felted-wool caps ($80) manufactured by an ancient Japanese company. A nineteenth-century Chinese bathtub is home to a gaggle of bubble-eyed goldfish ($3,000, fish included). Miniature ears of corn sport cultured-pearl kernels and eighteen-karat-gold husks; the smaller ones ($1,500) can serve as brooches, the larger ($3,500) are content to garner admiration on the living-room table.

Great care has been taken at **APARTMENT 48** (48 W. 17th St.; 807-1391) to make shoppers feel as though they are stepping into an actual residence, but in fact "it's all pretend," as a salesman admits: the place was a hair salon called Ling's before the present owner installed a fake fireplace, a pedestal tub, a king-size bed, and other domestic necessities. Now, Martini glasses with candy-striped stems crowd the kitchen shelves ($24); pale, elegant piggy banks are perched above the crib in the nursery ($32); and a solitary antique porcelain teacup festooned with forget-me-nots livens up the garden room ($22.50). The offerings at **LE GAMIN** (114 W. Houston St.; 654-6685) are similarly hand-picked, though the focus is narrower—the shop is owned by the people who run the Le Gamin cafés, and the merchandise is appropriately Gallic. A round table is laden with white Pillivuit porcelain dinnerware ("*depuis 1818*," according to the stamps on the bottoms), including chick-shaped egg cups ($12) and a goose-headed dish intended for foie gras that could also hold candy or olives ($45). Espadrilles worthy of Gerald Murphy are $30; a Petit Bateau T-shirt in French blue is $28; a mid-century Ricard carafe is $50. The whole business would fit easily in a vintage basket that looks like it just gave up its spot on the patio of the Hotel du Cap ($95).

Continental style is one thing; downtown eclecticism is another. **ZAO** (175 Orchard St.; 505-0500), a loftlike emporium nestled in a row of rough-and-tumble Lower East Side tenements, gathers merchandise from more than a hundred vendors but manages a distinct South-of-Houston-Street sensibility. Neither the sausage-shaped chain-mail pillows ($560) nor the suède stiletto-heeled fringed boots ($520) nor the paper-box clocks ($45) seem intended for a Park Avenue dowager. A trio of crinkly cotton Issey Miyake T-shirts, two adult-size white garments and a miniature egg-yolk-yellow version, come packaged in a plastic egg ($220); a far larger oval object turns out to be a refrigerator by the Italian firm Zanussi ($4,200). If ever an appliance deserved to be called adorable, this is the one.

—*Lynn Yaeger*

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—Pianist **Uri Caine,** who loves linking classical music and jazz in wholly fresh, often outrageously creative ways, arrives this week courtesy of the Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival. June 1-2: Caine's Mahler Project takes the composer's work and refracts it through the prisms of such imaginative jazzmen as reeds player **Don Byron** and trumpeter **Ralph Alessi,** as well as turntable guru **DJ Olive.** June 3-4: Bach aficionados still outraged by Glenn Gould's personal interpretations of the master's Goldberg Variations should stay far away from Caine's radical reinvention featuring Byron and Olive. Dining.

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Highlights of the Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival. June 4: A rare appearance by the trio of drummer **Andrew Cyrille,** bassist **Mark Dresser,** and reedman **Marty Ehrlich.** June 5: Trombonist **Roswell Rudd** has returned from the cold with a vengeance. With his band Broad Strokes, this early free-jazz advocate with a traditionalist heart has assembled a cross-generational big band, implanted with members of the art-rock quartet Sonic Youth, that will further confound our notions of how an aging jazz upstart is supposed to behave. June 6: If you enjoy slick neo-bop, it probably doesn't get any better than the Jazz Times Superband, an all-star outfit featuring trumpeter **Randy Brecker,** saxophonist **Bob Berg,** keyboardist **Joey DiFrancesco,** and drummer **Billy Hart.** June 6: The **Greg Osby** quintet. With his sharp-edged tone and stuttering rhythms, Osby remains one of the least predictable and most engaging alto and soprano saxophonists to have emerged in the past two decades.

SWEET BASIL
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The Bell Atlantic Jazz Festival brings the **Renee Rosnes** quartet in through June 4. Before our eyes, the Canadian expatriate pianist Rosnes has steadily evolved into a confident stylist whose aversion to clichés sets her apart. Dining.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—June 2-3: The **Louis Hayes** quintet. Hayes doesn't get the press that his peers routinely garner, but he remains one of the greatest hard-bop drummers. With experience as the rhythmic muscle for Cannonball Adderley and Oscar Peterson, he knows how to keep a band solid and swinging.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through June 4: The fleet-fingered young pianist **Eric Reed** tips his hat to our fair city, both on his most recent release, "Manhattan Melodies," and with his beefed-up ensemble, the New York Seven. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ZINC BAR
90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—May 30-31: The **Cindy Blackman** quartet. Blackman isn't the only female drummer on the jazz scene, nor is she even the most accomplished; still, she's garnered a solid reputation among many of the city's more engaging players, some of whom she may just entice into appearing with her.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—**"Now! Modern Photographs from the Permanent Collection."** Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"After Nicolas Poussin: New Etchings by Leon Kossoff."** Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Art and Oracle: Spirit Voices of Africa."** Through July 30. ♦ **"Painters in Paris: 1895-1950"** presents more than a hundred modernist works from the museum's collection, by thirty-eight masters. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"The World of Scholar's Rocks."** Through Aug. 20. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Making Choices."** The twenty-four-part show concentrates on works

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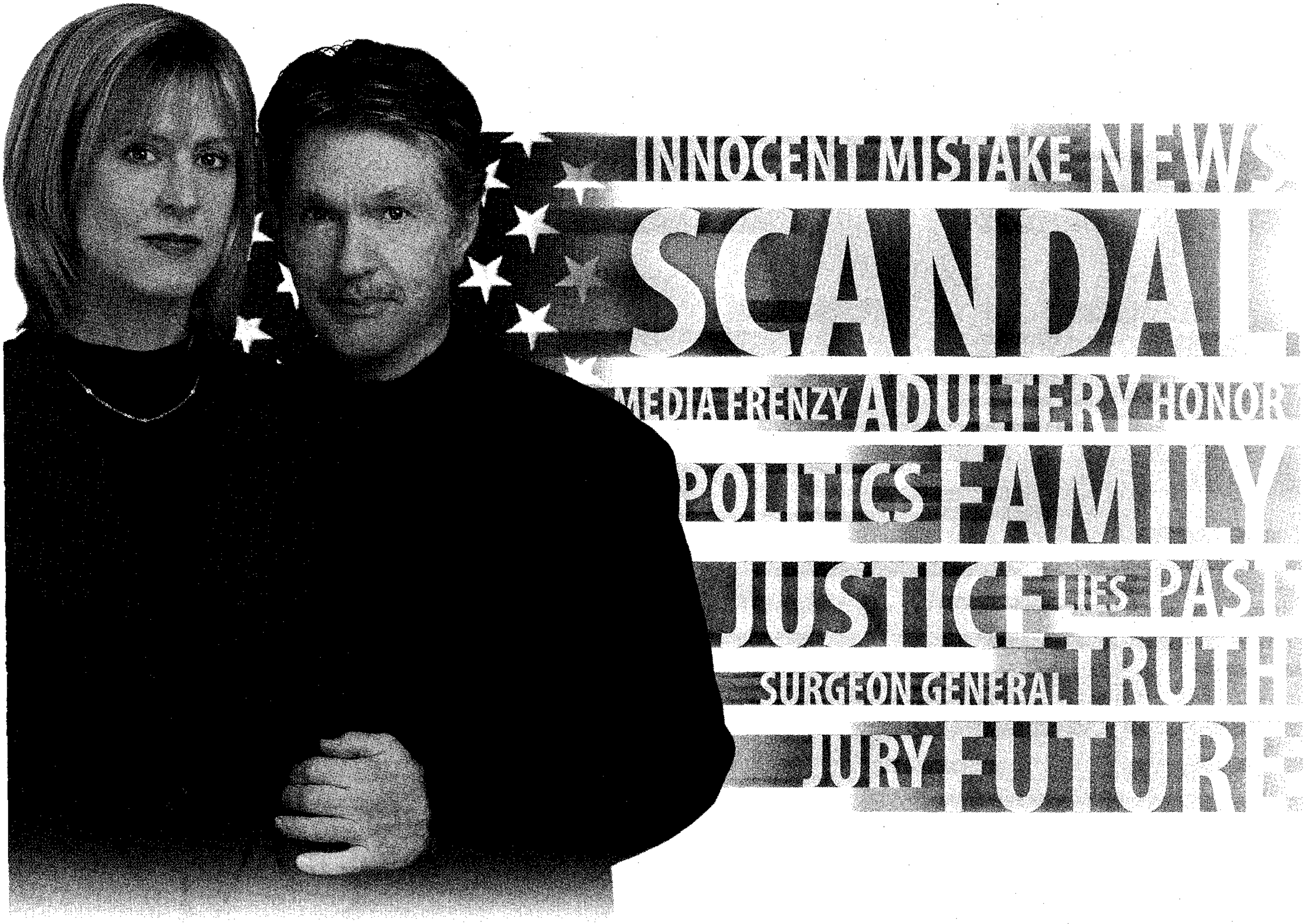
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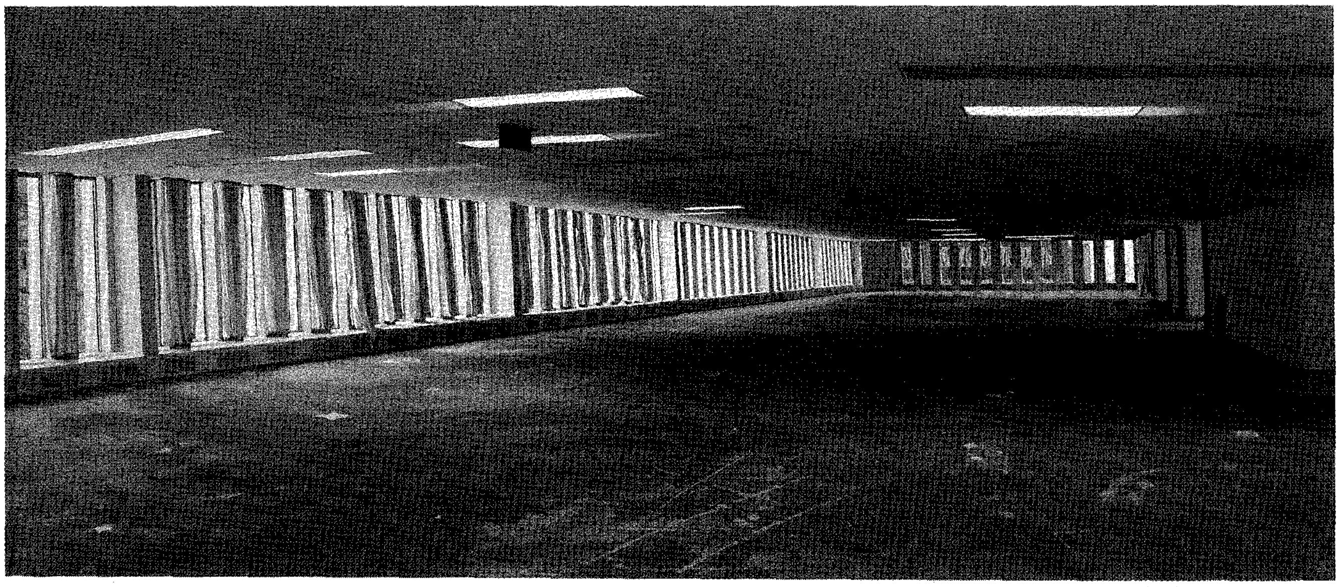


INSIDE EDITIONS *The English-born landscapist Rackstraw Downes has gone indoors in these recent canvases (at the Robert Miller gallery, in Chelsea), which depict huge hangarlike spaces—among them, Donald Judd's converted military barracks in Marfa, Texas, and unoccupied floors of the World Trade Center. In the Texas pictures, threads of daylight slice across floors and up walls with a geometric alacrity that rivals, and quietly trumps, Judd's own. At the World Trade Center, meanwhile, Downes has painted interior views of the twenty-sixth floor in different lights. The overcast version best captures the contrarian spirit of Downes's enterprise—what could be more resolutely unpicturesque than this vast, million-dollar tank of air?*

made between 1920 and 1960, drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings, in a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist (Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Morandi). Closing, in stages, on Aug. 22, Sept. 19, and Sept. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"1900: Art at the Crossroads,"** curated by Robert Rosenblum, focusses on the turn of the twentieth century, when abstraction was just a gleam in art's eye. The intention is to compare and contrast—classical vs. avant-garde, landscape vs. portraiture, Danish vs. Spanish (some twenty-six countries are represented), and so on. But as soon as the red carpet is (literally) rolled out in the first gallery, re-creating an exposition at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, insipid academic painting gets the upper hand. The cloying piety of Bouguereau's "Regina Angelorum" seems almost gritty next to the Alpine tumble of rosy babies in Léon Frédérick's "The Stream," a picture so ghastly it's mesmerizing (the wall text calls it "a cornucopia of infant flesh"). If you continue past the salon-style deluge of this opening act, you'll be intermittently rewarded by fine examples of Cézanne, Hodler, and Hammershoi, among others. But on the whole the show could be subtitled "When Bad Art Happens to Good Museums." Through Sept. 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—The latest Biennial exhibition would be a greater pleasure—the installation is thoughtfully paced, spare, and clear—if only there were more art works that held one's attention. Instead we get a "Stepford Wives" version of contemporary art: most everything looks placid, numb, and earnestly mediocre. Exceptions include a sprawling mobile by the whimsical Sarah Sze, a trio of John Currin's odes to Wasp pulchritude, and Robert Gober's ghoulish sink sculptures, in which faucets are replaced by cadaverous legs. Painting, despite its current liveliness, is poorly represented, which may be why the video installations, especially those by Doug Aitken and Shirin Neshat, make such a strong impression. Through June 4. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Triassic equivalent of professional wrestling is here: **"Fighting Dinosaurs"** showcases one of the greatest paleontological finds of the past century. In the Gobi desert almost thirty years ago, a Polish-Mongolian team came across the remains of two dinosaurs, a carnivorous velociraptor and a vegetarian protoceratops, apparently caught in a brawl to the death. More recent finds, including early mammals and new links between dinosaurs and birds, are also on view, along with video projections, a diorama, and chip-away re-creations of digs. Oddly enough, it was geopolitics as much as shovels and picks which brought most of this kiddie catnip to light: Mongolia's post-Soviet independence allowed American scientists to return to the region they had first excavated in the twenties. Through Oct. 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS
548 W. 22nd St. (989-5566)—Long before "Go West, young man" meant "Move to Chelsea," artists have looked to the American frontier for inspiration. This two-person show, **"The Nearest Faraway Place,"** pairs heavy hitter (and horse trainer) Bruce Nauman with the lesser-known, Canadian conceptualist Rodney Graham. Nauman, who has lived in New Mexico for more than twenty years, has an earnest, if irreverent, relationship to the subject; Graham, by comparison, comes off as a wisecracking city slicker. Nauman's rotating carousel of taxidermy specimens and footage of his neighbor skinning a fox opens the show. Graham counters with a deadpan diptych, "Fishing on a Jetty," in which the artist is seen angling against the backdrop of the Vancouver skyline. Through June 18. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, noon to 6.)

NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2 W. 77th St., at Central Park W. (873-3400)—**"Magnum: Our Turning World."** The exhibit devoted to recent work from Cartier-Bresson's artist-owned agency opens with a dismembered statue of Lenin being moved by barge past a wooded island. But the image is staged; the caption reads "The making of the film 'Ulysses' Gaze.' " Magnum, now fifty years old, has survived many changes in the practice and perception of documentary photography, and won't be hurt by this winking curatorial postmodernism. As is currently fashionable, the show is divided into high-concept segments: "Chronicle of Chaos" covers diplomacy and its failures, up to and including war, while "Enduring Rituals" and "Daily Aesthetics" look at ostensible peace. Perhaps because there's so much black-and-white in the former, and more fun in the latter, the show seems split along the lines of classic and contemporary photography. Through June 18. ♦ **"The Stork Club."** Mementos abound in a somewhat unconvincingly staged (is it the fluorescent lighting?) re-creation of the famous club—originally a speakeasy, eventually a society watering hole, and ultimately a failed disco. Lest anyone think the Hard Rock Café invented merchandising, items on display include Stork Club ties, lapel pins, and a bomber jacket—albeit one hand-painted for an airman who flew in the Stork Club squadron. Through Oct. 1. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 11 to 5.)

GALLERIES-UPTOWN

Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ELIZABETH COOPER
Art-school cynicism and primary-school silliness collide in these jubilant paintings, composed of blurts of bright color. Some of Cooper's canvases suggest the frosting-bespattered floor of a slovenly pastry shop. Others might be collections of comic-book impact balloons, with each "Kapow!," "Blam!," and "Whump!" rendered as an exclamatory splatter of pigment. Only when she tries to prove her art-historical pedigree—as in a large pastiche of Clyfford Still—do Cooper's wry, happy covers of Abstract Expressionist melodies lose their charm. Through June 6. (Roger Smith, 501 Lexington Ave., at 47th St. 832-8831.)

Short List

FREDERICK EDWIN CHURCH
Berry-Hill, 11 E. 70th St. 744-2300.
Through July 15.

INKE ESSENHIGH / PETER HALLEY
Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.
752-2929. Both shows through June 24.

LORRAINE SHEMESH
Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 987-1655.
Through June 9.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

RACKSTRAW DOWNES
The English-born painter's oils depict huge interior spaces, including a vast barracks that belonged to Donald Judd. The sites are monuments to hubris, and one suspects Downes may have begun the paintings as a gentle rebuke. The results, though, are quietly thrilling, even tender. Judd's spare, concrete structures, open to glimpses of scrub and yucca, seem beautifully airy, cool, and tranquil. Looking at them, you feel that a rapprochement between two utterly different artists has taken place—as unexpected, in its way, as Alice Neel's portrait of Andy Warhol. Through June 10. (Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774.)

ELLIOTT GREEN / STEVE MUMFORD
Like a cross between Dick Tracy and saltwater taffy, Green's cartoony figures stretch long, stylized limbs to kick, tickle, comfort, and jab each other. The narrative details are obscure, but the basic predicament will feel familiar to anyone who has spent a long car ride with a passel of siblings. Green makes cramped, irritable intimacy look fun. Mumford, on the other hand, paints big, sardonically sublime landscapes, some of which are partly based on dioramas at the Museum of Natural History. They're outtakes from a spectacle-crazed, male imagination. Drowning cars sink through schools of barracuda, a puma reclines comfortably in the twilit New Jersey Meadowlands, and, in the silliest and most satisfying image of all, an enormous demonic sailfish plunges ecstatically into a school of minnows. Through June 24. (Postmasters, 459 W. 19th St. 727-3323.)

JOACHIM KOESTER
This Danish-born, New York-based artist gives new meaning to the phrase "freeze frame" in a slide installation depicting Greenland's portion of the ice cap. The barren images of sky and ice fade in and out, nearly indistinguishable from one another, recalling the old joke about the polar bear in a snowstorm. The subtitles are excerpted from the diary of A. E. Nordenskiöld, a Swedish scientist and the first European to explore the region, in 1870. Through June 10. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.)

GROUP SHOW
This smart, if somewhat affected, five-person exhibition shows off the Cooper gallery's soaring space as much as the artists in it, which may be the point, since all but one of the works on view refer explicitly to architecture (notably, Wayne Gonzales's trippy rendering of an International Style façade). Gallery artist Dan Walsh has outlined the space with black tape, turning it into a 3-D version of his own paintings, and the installation as a whole plays cleverly with scale. This ploy is best put to use in the case of Rita McBride, whose pint-size aluminum parking ramp faces off against her elegant stadium-size bleachers. Through June 3. (534 W. 21st St. 255-1105.)

Short List

WALTON FORD
Kasmin, 293 Tenth Ave., at 27th St.
563-4474. Through June 30.

PAUL GEORGES
Center for Figurative Painting, 115 W. 30th St.
868-3452. Through June 10.

VANESSA JANE PHAFF
I-20 Gallery, 529 W. 20th St. 645-1100.
Through June 17.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

MARTHA ARMSTRONG
Trees and lawns, bicyclists and pedestrians, bright July sunlight and leashed, sprinting shadows: these landscapes evoke a rural campus, generously endowed by André Derain and Fairfield Porter. Within its comfortable precincts, Armstrong's New England Fauvism feels both disciplined and perplexingly ebullient. How can something so familiar—yet another color-drunk late modernist looking at the world around her—be so fresh? For viewers in a cynical mood, the loveliness of these canvases registers as a bracingly affectionate slap. Through June 8. (Wickiser, 568 Broadway. 941-1817.)

Short List

BO BARTLETT
P.P.O.W, 476 Broome St. 941-8642.
Through June 3.

SERENA BOCCHINO
Exhibit A, 160 Mercer St. 343-0230.
Through June 17.

SQUEAK CARNWATH
Beitzel, 102 Prince St. 219-2863.
Through June 3.

JOHN CHAMBERLAIN
Pace Wildenstein, 142 Greene St.
431-9224. Through June 10.

DONNA SHARRETT
Pelavin, 13 Jay St. 925-9424.
Through June 24.

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

SOTHEBY'S
May 31-June 1: An auction of Latin-American art, including, on the opening night, an exceptional self-portrait by Frida Kahlo painted in 1929 (the year of her marriage to Diego Rivera); the second day opens with an interesting group of Colonial pieces before proceeding to twentieth-century works. ♦ June 1: Sporting art, including paintings by Alfred J. Munnings and George Stubbs. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

CHRISTIE'S
Latin-American paintings. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 636-2000. June 1-2.)

CHRISTIE'S EAST
Nineteenth-century furniture and decorative art works. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0430. May 31.)

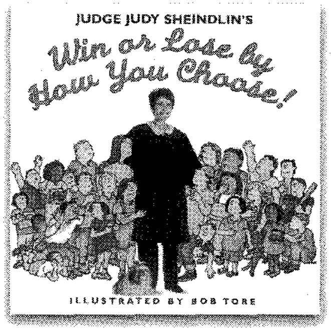
PHOTOGRAPHY

CATHERINE CHALMERS
"Pinkies," this series of striking color studio pictures, shows its title characters—blind, hairless baby mice—as they are born, live briefly, huddle for warmth, and die in the mouths of frogs and snakes, their natural predators. Contrary to the common cinematic pledge, animals were harmed in the making of these pictures. Through June 17. (Rare, 435 W. 14th St. 645-5591.)

PETER FREITAG
Freitag's enlarged travel-brochure pictures are a familiar mimicry of advertising, complicated by the removal of props; he has erased the cigarettes, magazines, beach towels, and cocktails from models' hands and bags and dresser tops. The results are somewhat eerie, but not enough to stop anyone from going on vacation. Through June 24. (Clementine, 526 W. 26th St. 243-5937.)

KURT KRANZ
A slight show of the German artist's early work. Bring reading glasses: the best pieces are 35-mm. frames cut from contact sheets and pasted down on cheap brown paper. Amidst snapshots of colleagues horsing around and standard light-and-shadow studies, a pair of images stands out—the two shots in "Meine Mutter," which build a loving portrait of what looks like a tough mother with a sly sense of humor. Through June 10. (Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St. 431-0292.)

HELEN LEVITT
For more than sixty years, Helen Levitt has been the master of the street sublime. Two men leap for a basketball and are held in a frieze worthy of Paul Taylor's dancers. Stoops and vacant lots become stages for the impromptu performances of childhood. This survey includes many of Levitt's greatest hits,



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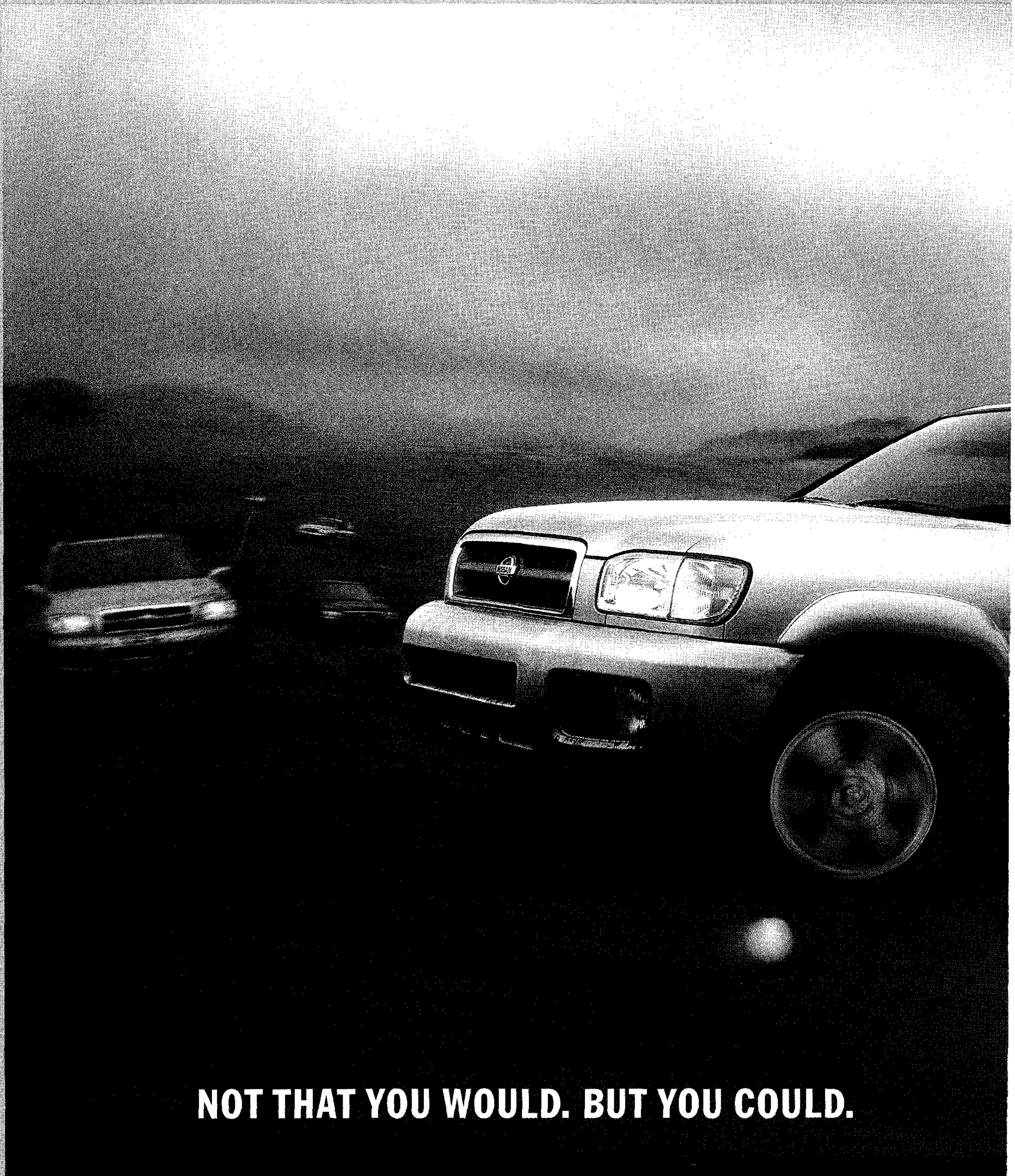

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some rarely seen color work, and large new prints of her nineteen-thirties chalk-drawing images. Through June 29. (Miller, 20 W. 57th St. 397-3930.)

MALERIE MARDER
A spinoff of last season's much talked about group show, "Another Girl, Another Planet," Marder's "Because I Was Flesh" puts out plenty of "flesh," but doesn't deliver on the "because." Her large color prints of family, friends, and lovers posed in naked boredom sit on the walls like a series of tableaux vivants, mirroring the lifelessness of exhibits at a natural-history museum. A sense of discomfort (along with some digital manipulation and Marder's understanding of color) makes the work compelling, if only for a moment. Through June 10. (Lawrence Rubin Greenberg Van Doren, 730 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 445-0444.)

STEPHEN SHORE
With all the recent attention given to contemporary large-format photographers like Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, a scramble to claim their artistic paternity should be no surprise. This show of Stephen Shore's 1972 road-trip snapshots and his seminal 1978-88 color landscapes is a contender. Though they don't have the conceptual strength of Gursky's work, Shore's photographs reflect his influential search for beauty in the mundane. Through June 3. (303, at 525 W. 22nd St. 255-1121.)

AMIR ZAKI
Zaki's title "Photographs From" suggests the physical perches from which he shoots—atop the roofs of Los Angeles buildings and parking structures. His night surveillance only takes in incidental light—street lamps over deserted back lots, floodlights on a skyscraper, and one window with blurry signs of life inside. Through June 24. (Caren Golden, 526 W. 26th St. 727-8304.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—Nathan Lyons's **"Riding First Class on the Titanic."** Through June 18. ♦ James Nachtwey's **"Testimony."** Through July 23. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

MORTON BARTLETT
Ricco/Maresca, 529 W. 20th St. 627-4819.
Through June 24.

BARBARA ESS
Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200.
Through June 10.

MARIA MIESENBERGER
Mann, 210 Eleventh Ave., at 25th St.
989-7600. Through July 7.

CATHERINE OPIE
Thread Waxing Space, 476 Broadway.
966-9520. Through June 10.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum, and the New-York Historical Society.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY
Contralto Ellen Rabiner sings the title role in a semi-staged version of Vivaldi's "Il Tamerlano," a 1735 "pasticcio opera," in which the composer incorporated music by other figures (including Hasse and Porpora) to eke out his original contributions to the score. Dino Anagnost conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. May 31 at 7:30.)

GOLDEN FLEECE, THE COMPOSERS CHAMBER THEATRE
This adventurous company offers three premières: Jon Deak's "Owl in Love" (based on a Haitian folk tale), Matthew Harris's "Tess" (after Hardy's "Tess of the D'Urbervilles"), and Lou Rodgers's "Happy Valentine" (to a libretto involving a love triangle, by William Cotter). (Theater 22, at 54 W. 22nd St. June 1-3 and June 5 at 8 and June 4 at 3 and 8. For information about tickets, call 691-6105.)

AMATO OPERA COMPANY
Presenting "The Marriage of Figaro," in English. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 228-8200. June 2-3 at 7:30 and June 4 at 2:30. Through June 18.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
In the season's final subscription performances, Kurt Masur conducts Mahler's Symphony No. 9. (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. June 1-3 at 8.)

EOS ORCHESTRA
George III is most remembered on these shores as the British monarch who lost the American Revolution; it is less generally known that he also lost his mind. From 1788 until his death, in 1820, he suffered from lengthy bouts of debilitating insanity, leaving the responsibilities of government to others while he babbled incessantly and tried to teach caged birds to sing. Peter Maxwell Davies's 1969 music-theatre piece, "Eight Songs for a Mad King" (for male singer and chamber ensemble), is a compelling, often harrowing depiction of George's unravelling. In the work's original production, the musicians were stationed inside huge birdcages, thereby emphasizing the king's futile pastime and underscoring the notion that his madness served as a kind of imprisonment. In fact, one of the eight songs is actually notated on staves arranged in the shape of a cage. This fully staged performance of Davies's cult classic is conducted by Jonathan Sheffer and features baritone Dean Elzinga. Completing the program are less shocking works, both of which were premièred in George III's England: Johann Christian Bach's Overture to "Orione" and Haydn's Symphony No. 104. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. June 1 at 8. For information about tickets, call 691-6415.)

CONCORDIA ORCHESTRA
Jazz-inflected scores by Carl Davis (both composed in 1989) provide an accompaniment to screenings of Harold Lloyd's 1923 feature film, "Safety Last," and Charlie Chaplin's short "Kid Auto Races at Venice" (which marked the first appearance of Chaplin's famous screen persona, "the Tramp"). Marin Alsop conducts. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. June 1 at 8.)

AMOR ARTIS CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA
Johannes Somary directs Verdi's "Requiem," with the Fairfield County Chorale and the Horace Mann Glee Club adding their voices to the forces. (Carnegie Hall. 247-7800. June 1 at 8.)

MANHATTAN CHAMBER CHOIR AND ORCHESTRA
Britten's "Rejoice in the Lamb" and Liszt's "Missa Choralis" are conducted by Robert Prior, who also appears as the soloist in Mozart's Piano Concerto in E-Flat Major (K. 271), with Magnus Mårtensson taking over the podium. (Church of the Holy Innocents, 128 W. 37th St., near Broadway. June 2 at 7:30. No tickets necessary.)

BACHANALIA CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
The ensemble's concert includes Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht," Villa-Lobos's "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 9," and the premières of Jakov Jakoulov's Romance for Violin and Strings (featuring the group's director, Nina Beilina) and elaborated transcriptions, by Philip Lasser, of two sets of preludes and fugues from Bach's "Well-Tempered Clavier." (St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. June 2 at 8. For information about tickets, call 203-938-2924.)

WILD GINGER PHILHARMONIC
David Goodman conducts the Overtures to Wagner's "Tannhäuser" and Humperdinck's "Hänsel und Gretel," Fauré's Pavane, and Brahms's Symphony No. 3. (Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St. June 2-3 at 8. Admission by contribution.)

RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL SINGERS
Helen Cha-Pyo leads a program that includes "A Garland for Linda," a collaborative a-cappella choral cycle created as a memorial to the late Linda McCartney by Paul McCartney, John Tavener, Richard Rodney Bennett, and other British composers. (Riverside Church, Riverside Dr. at 120th St. June 3 at 8. For information about tickets, call 307-4100.)

MUSIC BEFORE 1800
Although its primary focus is on early music, this organization has also commissioned a number of new sacred works in the course of its twenty-five-year history. In this concert, Louise Basbas directs the Choir of Corpus Christi Church in eight of these pieces, by David MacBride, Harvey Burgett, Jackson Hill, Louise Talma, Maurice Wright, and Catherine Aks. (Christ Church and Holy Family, 326 Clinton St., Brooklyn. June 4 at 3. For information about tickets, call 212-666-9266.)

CHORAL SYMPHONY SOCIETY AND NEW YORK CANTATA SINGERS
David Labovitz directs the choruses and orchestra in Handel's pastoral oratorio "L'Allegro, il

ONLY CONNECT

STANDUP AND BE COUNTED
Standup comedy is one of the most social of all performance genres; it relies as much upon the volume of laughter in the room as upon the content of the jokes themselves. It is somewhat strange, then, that standup comedians have begun to crop up on the Web, including many of those represented at this year's eighth annual Toyota Comedy Festival. The week of laughs kicks off with a free June 1 reading by David Sedaris at Barnes and Noble in Union Square and runs through June 10, with a performance by Janeane Garafolo at Joe's Pub.

Though the festival includes more than two hundred funny types, the putative highlight of the ten-day program is Jon Stewart's June 8 appearance at Carnegie Hall. Whatever the success of the show, Stewart won't be giving up his day job, which is actually a night job: hosting the satirical news program "The Daily Show" on Comedy Central. The on-line version of **The Daily Show** (www.thedailyshow.com/dailyshow) is something of a poor cousin to its on-air counterpart; it's freighted with multimedia that will tax your computer's capacity and your patience, and it's too wordy by half. Still, Stewart's puckish delivery is very much in evidence, thanks to sound and video clips pulled from the show.

Stewart isn't the most wired standup comedian in the world. That honor goes, oddly, to Rodney Dangerfield, the aging grandee of self-annihilation. Dangerfield's official site, **Rodney.com** (www.rodney.com), has a wealth of comic and commercial content, including information on Rodney's stage and film appearances, a full-service "Rodneymabilia" store, and a joke of the day ("With girls I get no respect. A belly dancer told me I turned her stomach").

While Dangerfield has his feet firmly planted in cyberspace, other great standup comics seem to be consigned to oblivion. Lenny Bruce has no official site. Nor do Richard Pryor, Bill Cosby, or Mort Sahl. Sam Kinison has one (www.samkinison.org), but it's disappointing, as is Bob Newhart's semi-official site (www.bob-newhart.com), which favors Newhart's television and film appearances at the expense of his seminal comedy albums. Comedy fans looking for more substantive programming might want to visit the on-line home of the venerable midtown comedy club **Caroline's** (www.carolines.com), which offers Webcasts of interviews and live performances. (For more information on the Toyota Comedy Festival, visit the official site at www.toyotacomedyfestival.net, or call 888-338-6968.)

—Ben Greenman

Penseroso ed il Moderato.” The first two sections employ famous texts by Milton, to which (at the composer’s request) Handel’s occasional librettist Charles Jennens added the “Moderato” section—“moderato indeed,” according to a cynical wag who attended the première, in 1740. (Christ and St. Stephen’s Church, 120 W. 69th St. June 4 at 3. Admission by contribution.)

RECITALS

INOUYE CHAMBER ENSEMBLE
The chamber group presents (among other pieces) trios for oboe, bassoon, and piano by Haydn and Shinako Ito (a première), Robert Baksa’s Sonata for Accordion, and the premières of works for unusual combinations, such as David Loeb’s Sonata for Koto and Piano and Jin Xiang’s “The Du Jian Bird Chirps Blood,” for *dizi* (a Chinese flute) and percussion. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. May 31 at 8.)

NEW YORK TANGO TRIO
This ensemble of bandoneón, piano, and double bass performs tangos by Piazzolla, in a program that also includes discussion of the Argentine composer’s life and work by his recent biographer, María Susana Azzi. (Spanish Institute, 684 Park Ave. 628-0420. June 1 at 6:30.)

BARGEMUSIC
June 1-2 at 7:30: Mezzo-soprano Phyllis Pancella, violist Paul Neubauer, and pianist Timothy Hester collaborate on a program of works by Ives, Bloch, Ravel (his “Jeux d’Eau,” for piano), Loeffler (“Four Poems for Voice, Viola, and Piano”), and Brahms. ♦ June 3 at 7:30 and June 4 at 4: Violinist Nai-Yuan Hu, cellist Alban Gerhardt, and Mr. Hester perform Beethoven’s Piano Trio in E-Flat Major (Op. 70, No. 2); Mr. Neubauer completes the ensemble for Schumann’s Piano Quartet. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

DA CAPO CHAMBER PLAYERS
The artist Kurt Schwitters (1887-1948) was a bit of an odd duck. In the years just following the First World War, he began hanging around various avant-garde circles, showing a particular affinity for the Dadaists. While ripping up newspaper for a collage, he tore in half a bit of paper with the word *Kommerz* printed on it. He latched onto the nonsense term that remained—*Merz*—and started using it in various contexts. In 1923 he founded a magazine named *Merz,* and soon built his “Merzbau” in Hannover, a house constructed of trash which continued growing until it was destroyed in the next war. (He followed up with replacement “Merzbauten” in Norway and England, leaving the latter very incomplete when he died.) In the mid-twenties Schwitters created what is thought to be his only musical composition, his “Ursonate,” a vocal solo consisting of four traditionally named movements (“Rondo,” “Largo,” “Scherzo,” and “Presto”), but employing German phonemes instead of what are generally understood to be musical notes. In this concert, the “Ursonate” receives a rare performance in an adaptation for two voices by, and featuring, Lisa Moore and Martin Bresnick, better known as a pianist (she) and a composer (he) than as utterers of linguistic blips. Completing the program are works for conventional ensembles by Mr. Bresnick and three of his former students, Philippe Bodin, Belinda Reynolds, and Marc Mellits. (Washington Square Church, 135 W. 4th St. June 1 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

WOLFGANG PANHOFER
This Austrian cellist boasts the distinction of having been the youngest member ever of the Vienna Philharmonic; he has spent half his life in that orchestra, having joined it seventeen years ago at the age of seventeen. His New York début recital features pieces for unaccompanied cello by Bach (his Suite No. 5), Ernst Krenek, Miklós Rózsa, and Richard Wilson, among others. (Weill Recital Hall, at Carnegie Hall. June 1 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 759-5165.)

CHAMBER POTPOURRI
Violinist Roger Zahab, cellist David Russell, and pianist Robert Frankenberry offer works by seven contemporary composers, including Carter’s “Figment,” Judith Weir’s Piano Trio, and a new piece by Mr. Zahab. (St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, 346 W. 20th St. June 3 at 8. Tickets at the door.)

MORDECAI SHEHORI
The pianist performs Mozart’s Sonata in A Minor (K. 310) and Brahms’s “Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Handel,” among other works. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 718-885-2478. June 4 at noon.)

TRIO TIME
Violinist Melody Chan, cellist Angela Yeung, and pianist Dawn Chan perform piano trios by four late-eighteenth-century masters: Johann Schobert, Mozart (in B-Flat Major, K. 502), Haydn (in E-Flat Major, Hob. XV:31), and Beethoven (in G Major, Op. 1, No. 2). (St. Peter’s Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. June 4 at 2. Tickets at the door.)

METROPOLITAN SOLOISTS
The wind ensemble presents the first of three consecutive Monday-night concerts near the northern tip of Manhattan. This installment includes Krommer’s Nonet (Op. 79), Beethoven’s Septet, and Mozart’s “Gran Partita.” (Isham Park, Broadway at Isham St. June 5 at 7. No tickets necessary. In case of rain, the concert will take place at Holy Trinity Church, 20 Cumming St., between Broadway and Seaman Ave.)

MANNES BACH INSTITUTE
This month, the Mannes College of Music is hosting a study institute on the Leipzig master, which includes six public performances. The program for the first, which features six instrumentalists from the faculty, includes Bach’s “French” Suite No. 5 (with harpsichordist Arthur Haas) and the G-Major Trio Sonata (BWV 1038, with flutists Laura Gilbert and Judith Mendenhall), a spurious work which is probably by one of Bach’s sons or pupils. (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. June 5 at 8. Tickets at the door. The series continues, at various locations, through June 16. For further information, call 580-0210, ext. 277.)

THE QUEEN’S CHAMBER BAND
The ensemble performs the premières of vocal and instrumental chamber music by John Freeman, Joseph Summer, Dawn Buckholz, Judith Saint Croix, Robert Rollin, and Joe Solomon. (Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St. 501-3330. June 6 at 8.)

LISA GARNER
The flutist is joined by pianist Sallie Pummill Pollack and several other colleagues for a program of flute-oriented chamber works by Philippe Gaubert, Teresa Levelle, and Madeline Dring, among others. (Weill Recital Hall. 247-7800. June 6 at 8.)

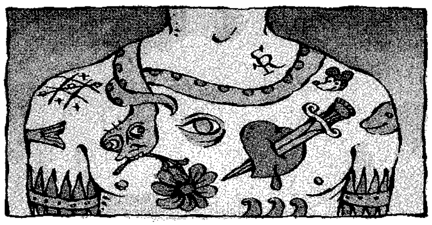
ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
May 31 at 7:30: By Kathryn Harrison, from her novel “The Binding Chair.” (Community Bookstore, 143 Seventh Ave., Park Slope, Brooklyn. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 4 at 4: By novelist Lisa Shea and short-story writer Stephen Clair, from their work. (Good World Bar & Grill, 3 Orchard St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 4 at 7: By Amy Hempel and Julia Slaven, from their fiction. (K.G.B., 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.) ♦ June 6 at 8: By writers Linda Yablonsky, Peter Landesman, and Elizabeth Macklin, from works written by Patricia Highsmith, Chester Himes, and Kenneth Fearing during their residencies at the artist colony Yaddo. (National Arts Club, 15 Gramercy Park S. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
June 3 at 2: David R. Brigham lectures on the work of Maxfield Parrish. (Brooklyn Museum of Art, Eastern Parkway. 718-638-5000.) ♦ June 6 at 6: During a party for the General Society Library’s annual book sale, which starts the following day, Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, authors of “Used and Rare” and “Slightly Chipped,” offer their take on book collecting. (20 W. 44th St. For more information, call 921-1767.)

BOOK CURRENTS

Tattoo You



SERGIO RUZZIER

Once the badge of sailors, circus performers, and bikers, the tattoo has reinvented itself in recent years and can now adorn anyone from bankers to movie stars. The authors of **WRITTEN ON THE BODY: THE TATTOO IN EUROPEAN AND AMERICAN HISTORY**, edited by Jane Caplan (Princeton), situate this recent development within a history that stretches back some five thousand years, judging by the fifty-seven tattoos that were discovered on a frozen Alpine mummy in 1991. Despite this early start, tattoos did not catch on in the West until after Captain Cook’s first voyage to Polynesia (the word *tattoo* comes from the Tahitian). The craze spread through working-class society and even enjoyed a brief vogue among the Victorian aristocracy (Edward VII had several). At the same time, Christian missionaries in Polynesia were doing all they could to stamp out the pagan practice. Recently, modern Maori eager to reaffirm their roots have worked to revive the *moko*, a curvilinear tattoo that can cover the whole face.

Most American tattooists, by contrast, still refuse to tattoo the face, Margo DeMello writes in **BODIES OF INSCRIPTION: A CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE MODERN TATTOO COMMUNITY** (Duke), but her interviews and photographs show that there are few other limits. She describes how the new tattoo movement has tried to put a “ ‘middle class’ face on the art form.” Clearly, though, a sense of danger still accounts for much of the tattoo’s allure. In **PERV: A LOVE STORY** (Morrow), Jerry Stahl’s recent novel, Bobby, the sixteen-year-old narrator, spends a terrifying evening under the pen of a drunken tattoo artist who has discovered him in bed with his daughter. When Bobby finally dares to look at the result, he is surprised to see a beautiful rose blooming on his chest: “I couldn’t tell my shame from my excitement,” he recalls.

—Leo Carey

Books.
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Relax with a Good Book

THE ANGEL ON THE ROOF

by Russell Banks

Chock full of vivid imagination and honest insight, this captivating collection from one of the masters of modern American storytelling represents thirty years of short fiction, including nine new stories and newly revised versions from previous collections. Vibrating with compassion, wit and irony, the stories are culled from the heart as well as the outside world, stretching from New England to Florida and from the Caribbean to Africa. (HarperCollins)

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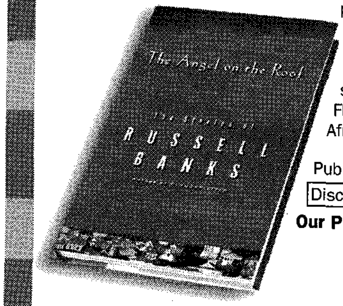
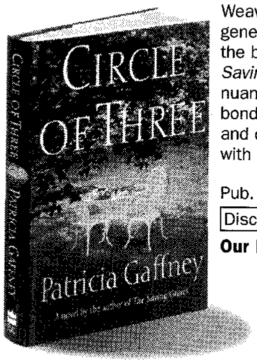


CIRCLE OF THREE

by Patricia Gaffney



Weaving together the moving stories of three generations of women in a small Virginia town, the best-selling author of the sleeper hit *The Saving Graces* explores the complexities and nuances of female relationships and family bonds. A multitude of layers of tradition, integrity and commitment among the women is revealed with wisdom and compassion. (HarperCollins)

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THE BOOMER

by Marty Asher

With trivial yet crucial events forming his life, *The Boomer* is an everyman, yet his own person—smart and successful but on the brink of despair. As he stumbles along aimlessly through life, a sudden crisis forces him to take stock of his world and find new meaning, leading him on a search for peace of mind and happiness. (Knopf)

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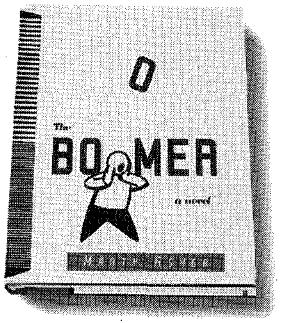

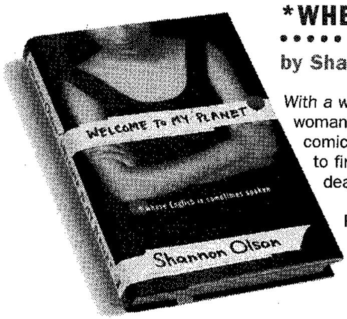

WELCOME TO MY PLANET* *WHERE ENGLISH IS SOMETIMES SPOKEN

by Shannon Olson

With a wacky sense of humor and a compelling voice, this coming-of-age tale of a young woman searching for a sense of identity is filled with intimate revelations, both truthful and comic. Confronting daydreams and past memories with present reality, the narrator struggles to find the answers to life's challenging questions on love, family and happiness, as she deals with therapy, debt, career problems, and bad relationships. (Viking)

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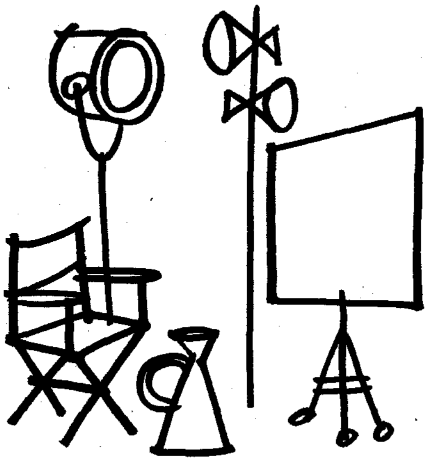

MOVIES OPENING

BIG MOMMA'S HOUSE
A comedy with Martin Lawrence, who plays an undercover F.B.I. agent disguised as a wisecracking Southern grandma. Opening June 2.

GRASS
Reviewed below in Film Notes. Opening May 31. (Film Forum.)

RUNNING FREE
The epic saga of Lucky, a young workhorse who is shipped to Africa, where he must persevere through war and abandonment. Directed by Sergei Bodrov. Opening June 2.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH
In the year 3000, mankind will be a depleted species—scavenging among the mountains, eating live rats, or toiling as slaves under the evil Psychlos. This is bad news, although it could be worse; mankind of the year 2000, for instance, is urged to sit in dark halls and watch a movie so worthless that even a rat, alive or dead, would come as welcome relief. John Travolta, with a bunch of old gray ropes where his hair should be, plays the Psychlo chief of security, who hates his job and has to contend with a band of rebellious earthlings. The director is Roger Christian, who, if early audience response is anything to go by, would do well to flee the country under an assumed name. The co-star is Forest Whitaker, a fine actor who must be praying that audiences will fail to penetrate his heavy disguise. And the script is adapted from the novel by L. Ron Hubbard, the father of Scientology; it would have taken all his fabled powers of spirit and intellect to weather this catastrophe. Meanwhile, for those who have wondered whether a philosophical message is embedded deep inside this film, good news. There is such a message, and it reads: "You are free to leave."—*Anthony Lane* (5/22/00) (Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

CENTER STAGE
Depressing. The great young American Ballet Theatre star Ethan Stiefel gets trapped in a story that is shaped like a teen-prom movie. His dance sequences are worthwhile—excerpts from ballets by Balanchine and MacMilland and a slumming jazz-dance-studio episode—but he's largely seen through the eyes of young Jody Sawyer (Amanda Schull), a sweetiekins who is one of the students at the fictional American Ballet Academy. There is a great deal of earnest material here about dating and parental pressure and bulimia, and when the heroine matures she chooses the sweet guy who respects her rather than the superstar who wants to sleep with her. The movie is filled with appropriate little lessons about life and love. Written by Carol Heikkinen. Directed by Nicholas Hytner.—*David Denby* (5/29/00) (Empire 25, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Village East Cinemas.)

CROUPIER
A slight and streamlined bauble from British director Mike Hodges (who did "Get Carter"), about a writer (played to stony perfection by Clive Owen) who takes a job as a roulette dealer, aiming, in the process, to write a best-seller about his experiences. The plot revolves around the big chance he takes when he rescues a mysterious woman (Alex Kingston of "ER") from a life-threatening gambling debt. The lean and twisted screenplay—nobody is what he seems—gives Hodges ample time to play with doppelgängers, duplicity, and lots of mirrors. The sombre turns of the story and low-key performances are a welcome reminder that taut moviemaking (where violence erupts unchoreographed) can be as exciting as fast-paced editing and scorching pyrotechnics.—*Bruce Diones* (First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

DINOSAUR
A fabulously expensive talking-animal movie from Disney that literalizes the art of animation out of existence. The animators took genuine footage of California, Jordan, and Australia and then placed computer-generated images of dinosaurs lumbering or fighting in the foreground of the shots. The detail in the computer images can be wonderful, but the photographed backgrounds, and the misguided need for "realism," drastically limit the fantastic play that animation is capable of: nothing happens that compares to the airborne absurdities of "Aladdin" or Tarzan's surfing through the upper branches of the forest. The story itself is regulation Disney stuff about an orphaned child—an iguanodon named Aladar (the voice of D. B. Sweeney)—who gets raised by lemurs and then joins a group of herbivores heading for a fabled nesting ground. Ossie Davis, Della Reese, Alfre Woodard, and Joan Plowright can be heard among the voices.—*D.D.* (5/29/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Union Square, and Waverly.)

FREQUENCY
A sentimental fantasy by director Gregory Hoblit which wants to be the mother of all father-son movies. This story of an adult son (James Caviezel) who communicates via ham radio with his long-dead dad (Dennis Quaid) has all the appropriate Twilight Zone twists. When the son warns his father of his soon-to-be accidental death, Dad takes the advice and survives, and their lives change (not for the better). Hoblit's camera lingers on the actors' faces, and the aggressively emotional performances feel authentic; the film's blatant heart-tugging is earned. The plot, however, about a serial killer who eludes capture because history's been altered (and the pursuit by father and son to bring him to justice), has major-league logic flaws, even for a time-travel picture ("Time Bandits" made more sense). Still, the film moves along at an entertaining clip (thanks to Hoblit's "Hill Street Blues" experience), and there are worse things than a sappy, well-acted thriller.—*B.D.* (Chelsea West, East 86th Street, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Sutton 1 and 2, Union Square, and Waverly.)

GLADIATOR
It's been many years since movie screens clanged with Roman history; directors are rightly cautious about trying to reconcile the drama of martial valor with the sight of men in short metal skirts. In the hands of Ridley Scott, however, the Empire strikes back; his new picture is strong and stirring, almost to a fault. Russell Crowe plays Maximus, a Roman general so victorious in battle and so popular with his troops that the incoming emperor, Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix), decides within minutes to have him killed. Maximus escapes but winds up in slavery, under the rheumy eye of Proximo (the late Oliver Reed). His prowess established in the arena, our hero returns to the Coliseum to perform his final act of revenge. The simplicity of the plot feels right; whenever the movie strays into complexity—as in the dealings between Commodus and his sister (Connie Nielsen)—it founders and slows. What you want is the games, and Scott delivers them avidly, complete with unfed tigers. The emotional and political aftertaste of the film is another matter; the way in which it encourages a lust for blood and a rage for the restoration of order will not bear much examination. When in Rome, however, you might as well cheer like the Romans.—*A.L.* (5/8/00) (Art Greenwich Twin, Astor Plaza, Coronet Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Ziegfeld.)

GRASS
A clever documentary about the government's war on marijuana that avoids the one-too-many-tokes humor that can mar such projects. Director Ron Mann footnotes his diatribe with hilarious government propaganda films that demonstrate the many shifts in official policy: weed will make you crazy, sex-crazed, heroin-addicted, lethargic, and on and on. The film's unlikely heroes are Fiorello LaGuardia, who commissioned his own study of marijuana (the results of which were suppressed by Harry J. Anslinger, the first head of the Federal Bureau of Narcotics) and Jimmy Carter, who ran for the Presidency on a pro-legalization platform. Hemp activist Woody Harrelson narrates.—*Michael Agger* (Film Forum.)

HAMLET
In this modern-dress version, the black towers of Times Square, fretted with neon, tessellated with ledges, balconies, and catwalks, make a sinister and eloquent setting for the power struggles within the Denmark Corporation. The bedraggled Hamlet (Ethan Hawke), a slacker in a knit cap, recites "To be or not to be" in a video store and washes Polonius's blood-soaked clothes in a laundromat. Yet this version of the world's most popular play is certainly not a travesty. Michael Almereyda, a young veteran of the New York independent scene, has developed his own form of visual poetry among the corporate settings and video screens, and many of the translations into contemporaneity are both witty and oddly right. Hawke is a depressed and adolescent Hamlet: it's not a noble or heroic interpretation, but he doesn't cross the border into self-pity, and, in the end, the emotional power of the old play comes through. With Kyle MacLachlan as the viciously happy C.E.O., Claudius; Diane Venora, much aroused by her new husband, as Gertrude; Bill Murray as Polonius; Liev Schreiber as Laertes; Sam Shepard as the Ghost; and Julia Stiles as Ophelia, a tense Manhattan girl with a weakness for reflecting pools and waterfalls. Music by Carter Burwell. Cinematography by John de Borman.—*D.D.* (5/15/00) (Angelika Film Center, Cinema II, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

HIGH FIDELITY
A short, sharp movie from Stephen Frears, who may be trying to shake himself awake after the languors of his last film, "The Hi-Lo Country." The source is Nick Hornby's buoyant novel, which was set in North London, but the shift to Chicago feels easy, perhaps because difficulties with girls and a penchant for listing favorite pop songs are universal symptoms of male haplessness. John Cusack stars as Rob, who runs a ratty record store called Championship Vinyl; if anything, the records are more tightly packed in his apartment, which may be why his girlfriend Laura (Iben Hjejle) has just moved out. For most of the picture, they duck and weave, unable to decide whether to stay together; not much happens, and, like Laura, you want things to move on. Yet Frears keeps jump-starting the action with fast cuts, flashbacks, and a jolting current of loud music. Why Frears made the film so dark and rain-drenched is something of a mystery; perhaps he was seeking a visual match for the glumness of perpetual adolescence. No love,

Candice Bergen 6/1 Princess Margaret 6/2 Mark Goodson 6/3 Morgan Fairchild 6/5 Clint Black 6/6

Vivien Leigh 6/7 Dick Powell 6/8 Gerald Ford 6/9 Lowell Thomas 6/10 Sally Field 6/12 Hulk Hogan 6/13 Deborah Kerr 6/14 Hedda Hopper 6/15 George VI 6/16

Col. Robert McCormick 6/17 Sam Phillips 6/18 Henry Winkler 6/19 Mary Magdalene 6/20 Prince William 6/21

Joe Louis 6/22 Wernher Von Braun 6/23 William S. Paley 6/24 Sandra Dee 6/26 Ed McMahon 6/27 Peter the Great 6/28 Richard Widmark 6/29 Billy Graham 6/30

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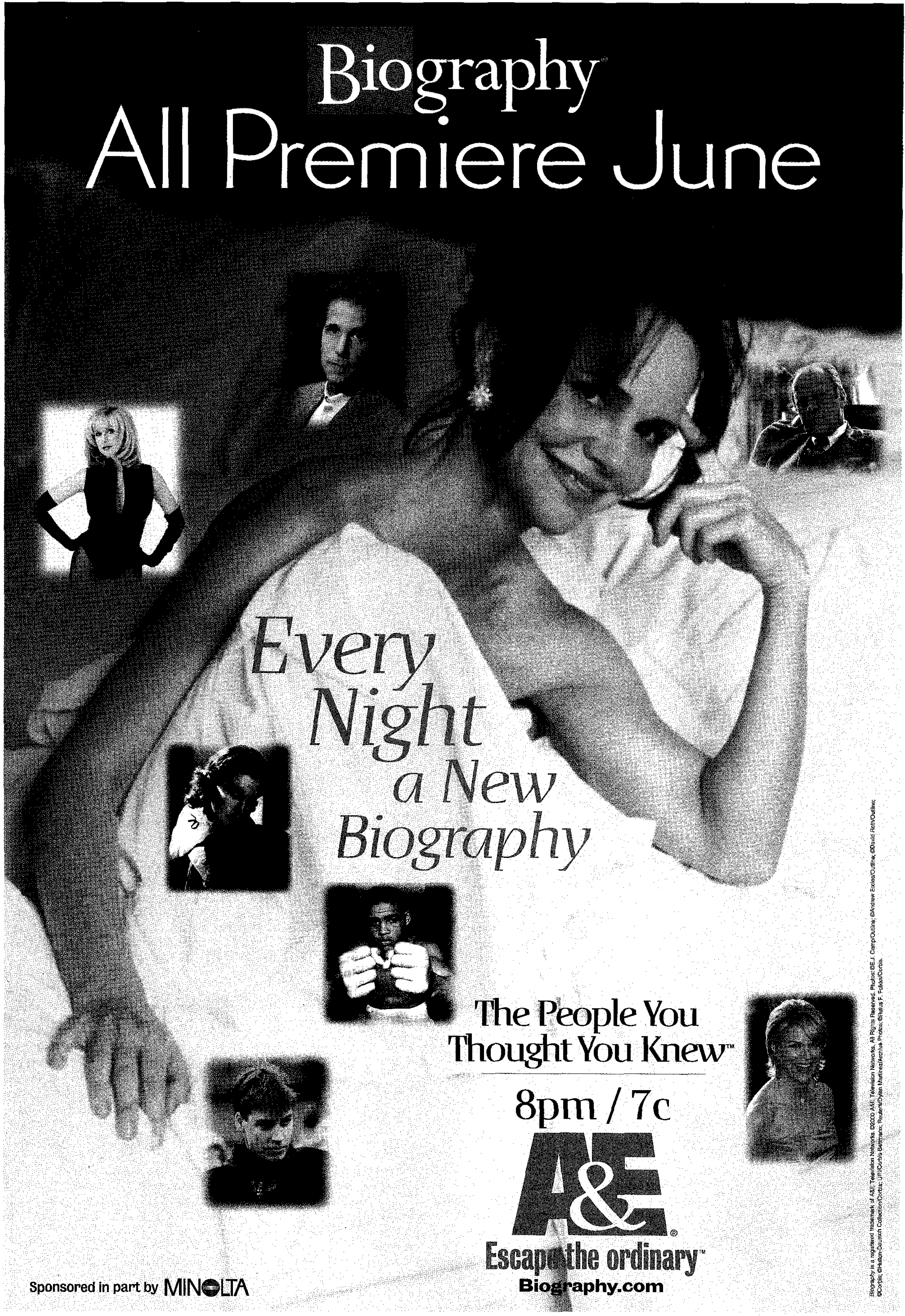

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Slumber parties, vampires, and confused teens abound in "Sapph-o-Rama," a retrospective of lesbian cult films at Film Forum.

the film ruefully suggests, will ever be as much fun as a good love song.—*A.L.* (4/3/00) (Criterion Center, Eastside Playhouse, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, and Village East Cinemas.)

M:I-2
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

PASSION OF MIND
The latest who-am-I-really? drama arrives courtesy of French director Alain Berliner ("Ma Vie en Rose") and Ron Bass, who wrote the script ten years ago, when the split-identity crisis may have had a whiff of freshness. Demi Moore plays a woman with two lives, two lovers, and, not surprisingly, two shrinks. In life number one, "Marie" gambols about in floral prints in the South of France and dines in caves with an English writer (Stellan Skarsgård). In life number two, "Marty" is a driven and despairing New York literary agent falling for a mellow accountant (William Fichtner). As Marty/Marie tries to decide which life and lover is the real one, it's pleasing to discover that, as for many New Yorkers, the secret to her identity lies hidden in the clutter of her apartment.—*M.A.* (Murray Hill Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, and Union Square.)

ROAD TRIP
College boys and girls in a series of raffish sex jokes pinned to a mere clothesline of a plot. There's an erotic prostate exam, an incriminating videotape, a sweet nerd with big ears who gets vamped by a sexually overpowering fat lady, and so on. Entertaining in a semi-contemptible way when you're watching it; immediately forgettable thereafter. With Breckin Meyer, Tom Green, Amy Smart, and DJ Qualls. Written by Todd Phillips and Scot Armstrong; directed by Phillips.—*D.D.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

SHANGHAI NOON
An extremely likable Western adventure that features the home-brewed stunts of Jackie Chan and the extemporaneous comic riffing of Owen Wilson (who borrows a lot from Dignan, the character he portrayed and co-wrote in the cult classic "Bottle Rocket"). Taking in a Jackie Chan movie is a lot like being ringside at a boxing match: the audience bobs, weaves, and shouts with every punch. As a Chinese imperial guard in search of a kidnapped princess, Chan fights his way through all of the classic Western scenarios (the train robbery, the saloon, the showdown at the Spanish church), and Wilson fills the interludes with deadly earnest lectures on the fine points of the cowboy code.—*M.A.* (Art Greenwich Twin, Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Murray Hill Cinemas, Sutton 1 and 2, and Union Square.)

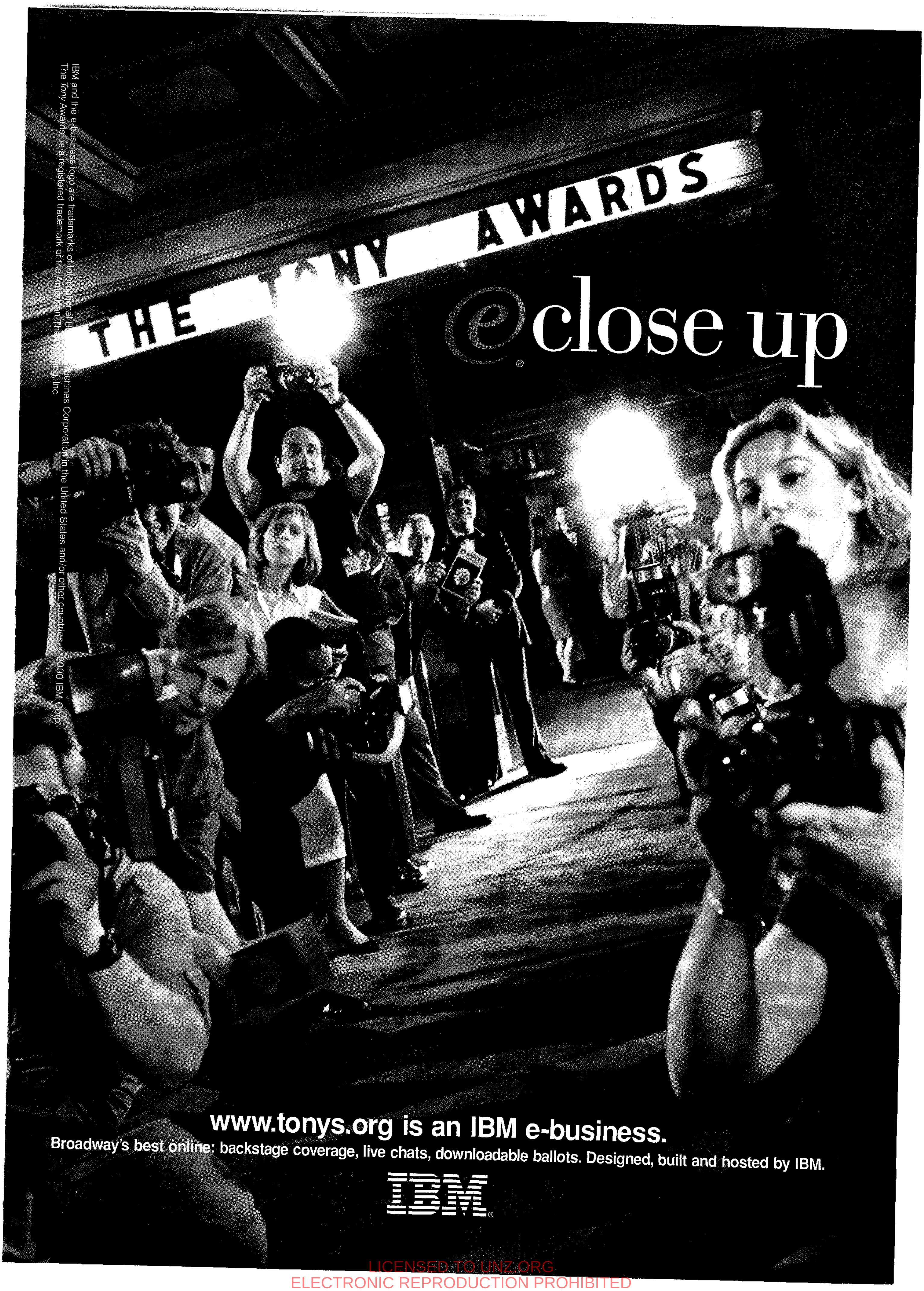
SMALL TIME CROOKS
A small-time comedy from Woody Allen, who seems to have shelved, if only temporarily, his studies of anguished human souls, preferring to draw our attention to the sight of human bodies getting into nasty scrapes and even nastier suits. In the new film, Woody himself plays a useless thief who, through no talent of his own, stumbles into money; the overriding purpose of this twist is that we get to see him wearing bilious green shirts, eye-scarring indigo jackets, and sub-Versace belts studded with gold rivets. This alone is worth the price of admission. Alongside Allen are Tracey Ullman, as his loud and triumphal wife, Hugh Grant, as the smoothie who is paid to educate her, Jon Lovitz, in a delightful but underused supporting role, and Elaine May, who slips the movie into her handbag and walks away with it. Parts of the plot creak and sag a little, but the middle section, in which our heroes bust a gut trying to spend their earnings, holds wonderfully firm; in the hands of a less savvy director it would have turned into an easy laugh at the flounderings of the nouveaux riches, but Allen keeps it sweet, hinting gently that the rich of any vintage can be a drag.—*A.L.* (5/22/00) (Beekman, East 85th Street, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, 19th Street East 6, Union Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE SOPRANOS (EPISODES 1-8)
The creator of the "The Sopranos," David Chase, had the smarts to drop a North Jersey mob boss named Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) into a dynastic battle straight out of the decadent ancient Rome of "I, Claudius," complete with a manipulative, narcissistic matriarch named Livia (Nancy Marchand). The pilot episode, which centered on Tony's first visit to his shrink (Lorraine Bracco), is one of the high points of TV history—and not just for its melding of "The Godfather" with the black comedy of "Prizzi's Honor." Who else but Chase would think of giving a mob boss a melancholy fixation on a family of wild ducks? His depiction of class friction and ethnic loyalties in upper-middle-class North Jersey, which Tony views as a playground for his appetites, and which his kids see as a glittering vacuum, is spot-on. By episode five, Chase has so indelibly established Tony's banter—and the battering of his psyche—that he reaches another high point with an atypical excursion: Tony's tour of New England colleges with his daughter, Meadow (Jamie Lynn Sigler), during which he stalks and kills a snitch.—*M.S.* (American Museum of the Moving Image; June 3-4.)

U-571
A lovably traditional and competent submarine action movie. In 1942, an American crew with Bill Paxton as the skipper and Matthew McConaughey as the executive officer undertakes to steal an Enigma coding machine from a wounded German U-boat. Much of the plot is given over to the submarine-warfare tropes that have served movies well for sixty years: the testing of a young officer (McConaughey) in combat, the terror of life below during a depth-charge attack by a German destroyer, the single functioning torpedo that has to be aimed perfectly, and so on. But the director, Jonathan Mostow, who showed a talent for shot-by-shot continuity and suspense in his first film, "Breakdown" (1997), demonstrates even greater skill here, and one is caught up in the impossible feats, rescues, and attacks. With disciplined performances by Harvey Keitel, Jake Weber, Jon Bon Jovi, Jack Noseworthy, and many others.—*D.D.* (5/15/00) (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and Union Square.)

UP AT THE VILLA
The new film by Phillip and Belinda Haas ("Angels and Insects") plays as smoothly as aged wine, but the material, adapted from a Somerset Maugham novella, substitutes worldliness for drama, and the Haases seem not to realize that there's something wrong with that. Visiting the Anglo-American expatriate community in Florence in 1938, a beautiful young English widow, Mary Panton (Kristin Scott Thomas), has to choose among three lovers: a buttoned-up-tight British aristocrat and diplomat (James Fox) who is much older than she, a young and penniless Austrian refugee (Jeremy Davies) who is given to self-dramatizing poses, and an American playboy (Sean Penn) who has a taste for danger and truly loves her. Should Mary choose comfort or excitement? This is a question that requires glamour, wit, and perhaps melodramatic excitement, not glum refinement. The Haases treat Maugham's skillfully wrought kitsch as if it were sombre moral exploration; they take the fun out of it without achieving anything serious. With Anne Bancroft in a poorly written role as a cynical American married to a fabulously wealthy Italian prince. Shot outside Siena, in a gorgeous estate doubling

RICHARD MERKIN



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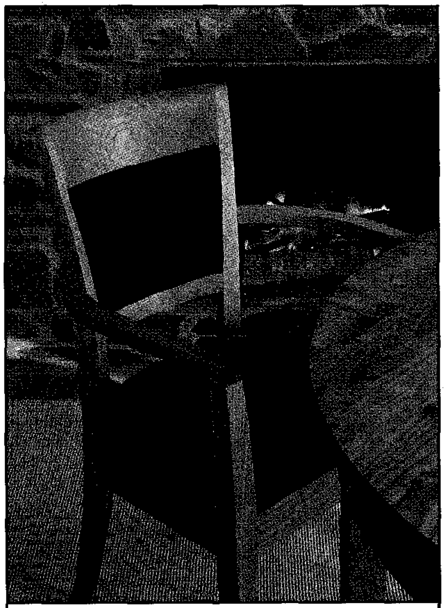

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for a Florentine villa.—*D.D.* (5/15/00) (Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Village East Cinemas.)

THE VIRGIN SUICIDES
Sofia Coppola's directorial début is a seventies period piece about five blond suicidal sisters (the Lisbons) and the young men who love them. It's hard to brighten suicide, and even harder to make it funny and mysterious at the same time, and this adaptation of Jeffrey Eugenides' novel veers awkwardly between comedy and fable. Coppola concentrates mostly on re-creating the mood of the book: the fantastic intensity of adolescence, when certain girls (and the desperate acts they inspire) can acquire the status of legend. We are told of the unravelling of the sisters from the boys' perspective (Giovanni Ribisi does the narration), but the film comes most alive when it goes inside the girls' hothouse environment: the handwritten notes, purple-inked doodles, and slumber-party décor are rendered perfectly. James Woods and Kathleen Turner turn in terrifyingly accurate performances as the overprotective Catholic parents of the Lisbon clan, but the overall atmosphere doesn't seem menacing enough: is being forced to burn your favorite "Kiss" album really reason to end it all?—*M.A.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Chelsea West, 62nd & Broadway, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, State, and Village Theatre VII.)

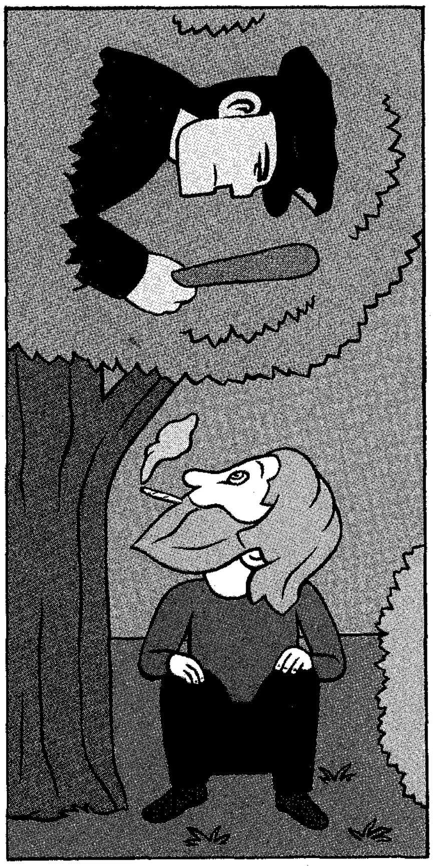
ALSO PLAYING

BIG KAHUNA
Empire 25, 59th Street East Cinema, and Union Square.
BOSSA NOVA
First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.
EAST IS EAST (4/24 & 5/1/00)
Angelika Film Center, BAM Rose Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.
EAST-WEST
BAM Rose Cinemas and Paris.
8 1/2 WOMEN
Cinema Village.
THE FILTH AND THE FURY (4/3/00)
Film Forum.
KEEPING THE FAITH (4/24 & 5/1/00)
Cinema 3rd Avenue, East 86th Street Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.
KIKUJIRO
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas and Quad Cinema.
TIME CODE
Angelika Film Center and Empire 25.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.



At Film Forum, "Grass" documents the government's anti-marijuana crusade.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through June 25: The first two seasons of "The

Sopranos," shown in order. June 3 at 2: "The Sopranos" (†) and "46 Long." ♦ June 3 at 4:15: "Denial, Anger, Acceptance" and "Meadowlands." ♦ June 4 at 2: "College" and "Pax Soprano." ♦ June 4 at 4:15: "Down Neck" and "Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti."

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—A Sam Peckinpah retrospective. June 1 at 7, June 3 at 4:30, and June 4 at 7: "Ride the High Country" (1962). ♦ June 1 at 9:30, June 3 at 7, and June 4 at 9:30: "The Wild Bunch" (1969). ♦ June 2 at 7 and June 3 at 9:30: "Pat Garrett & Billy the Kid" (1973). ♦ June 2 at 9:30 and June 4 at 4:30: "The Ballad of Cable Hogue" (1970).

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—June 1-5: Michel Ocelot's "Kirikou and the Sorceress" (1999; in French) and Hail Gerima's "Adwa" (1999; in Amharic) will screen as part of the DanceAfrica festival.

DOCFEST
May 31 - June 2: The Third Annual International Documentary Festival. For schedule and details, call 688-1575 or visit www.docfest.org.

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—A three-week retrospective of lesbian cult films. May 31: "Show Me Love" (1998, Lukas Moodysson). ♦ June 1: "Desert Hearts" (1985, Donna Deitch) and "Fire" (1997, Deepa Mehta). ♦ June 2: "The Vampire Lovers" (1970, Roy Ward Baker) and "Daughters of Darkness" (1971, Harry Kumel). ♦ June 3: "Caged" (1950, John Cromwell) and "Walk on the Wild Side" (1962, Edward Dmytrk). ♦ June 4: "The Bitter Tears of Petra Von Kant" (1972, R. W. Fassbinder) and "Seduction: The Cruel Woman" (1985, Elfi Mikesch and Monika Truet). ♦ June 6: "All Over Me" (1997, Alex Sichel) and "High Art" (1998, Lisa Cholodenko). ♦ The films of Clara Bow. June 5: "It" (1927, Clarence Badger) and "Dangerous Curves" (1929, Lothar Mendes).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through September 3: A complete "Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman" retrospective. June 2-4: Episodes 1-4.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—"Home Movies," a retrospective. June 2 at 7:30: "House" (1955, Charles and Ray Eames), "Home and Dome" (1965, Stan VanDerBeek), "Pat's Birthday" (1962, Robert Breer), and "Home Movies" (1973, Vito Acconci). ♦ June 3 at 2: "Afternoon" (1965, Andy Warhol). ♦ Films from the Library of Congress. June 2 at 8: "The Cossack Whip" (1916, John H. Collins). ♦ June 3 at 2: "The Old Dark House" (1932, James Whale). ♦ June 3 at 5: "The Bride of Frankenstein" (1935, Whale). ♦ June 4 at 5: "The Blue Eagle" (1926, John Ford).

THE NEW YORK LESBIAN & GAY FILM FESTIVAL
June 1-11: The twelfth year of the festival features the premières of "But I'm a Cheerleader" (1999, Jamie Babbit), "The Broken Hearts League" (2000, Greg Berlanti), "Chutney Popcorn" (1999, Nisha Ganatra), and "Urbania" (1999, Jon Shear). For schedule and details, call 254-8504 or visit http://www.newfestival.org.

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Through June 8: The golden age of the M-G-M musical. June 1: "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers" (1954, Stanley Donen) and "Anchors Aweigh" (1945, George Sidney). ♦ June 2-3: "Les Girls" (1957, George Cukor) and "An American in Paris" (1951, Vincente Minnelli). ♦ June 4-6: "The Pirate" (1948, Minnelli) and "Summer Stock" (1950, Charles Walters).

SYMPHONY SPACE
2537 Broadway (864-1414)—Films from Africa. June 6 at 7: "Sango Malo" (1990, Bassek ba Kobhio; in French). ♦ May 30 at 8:45: "Yeelen" (1987, Souleymane Cisse; in Bambara).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—June 2-8: "Thirteen" (1997, David Williams).

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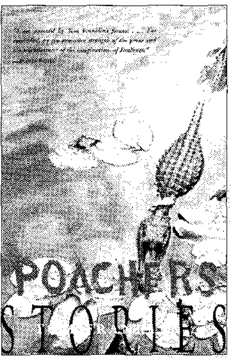

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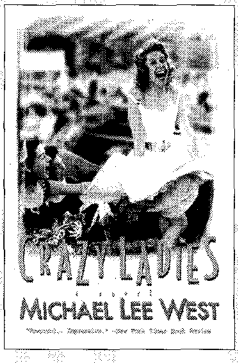

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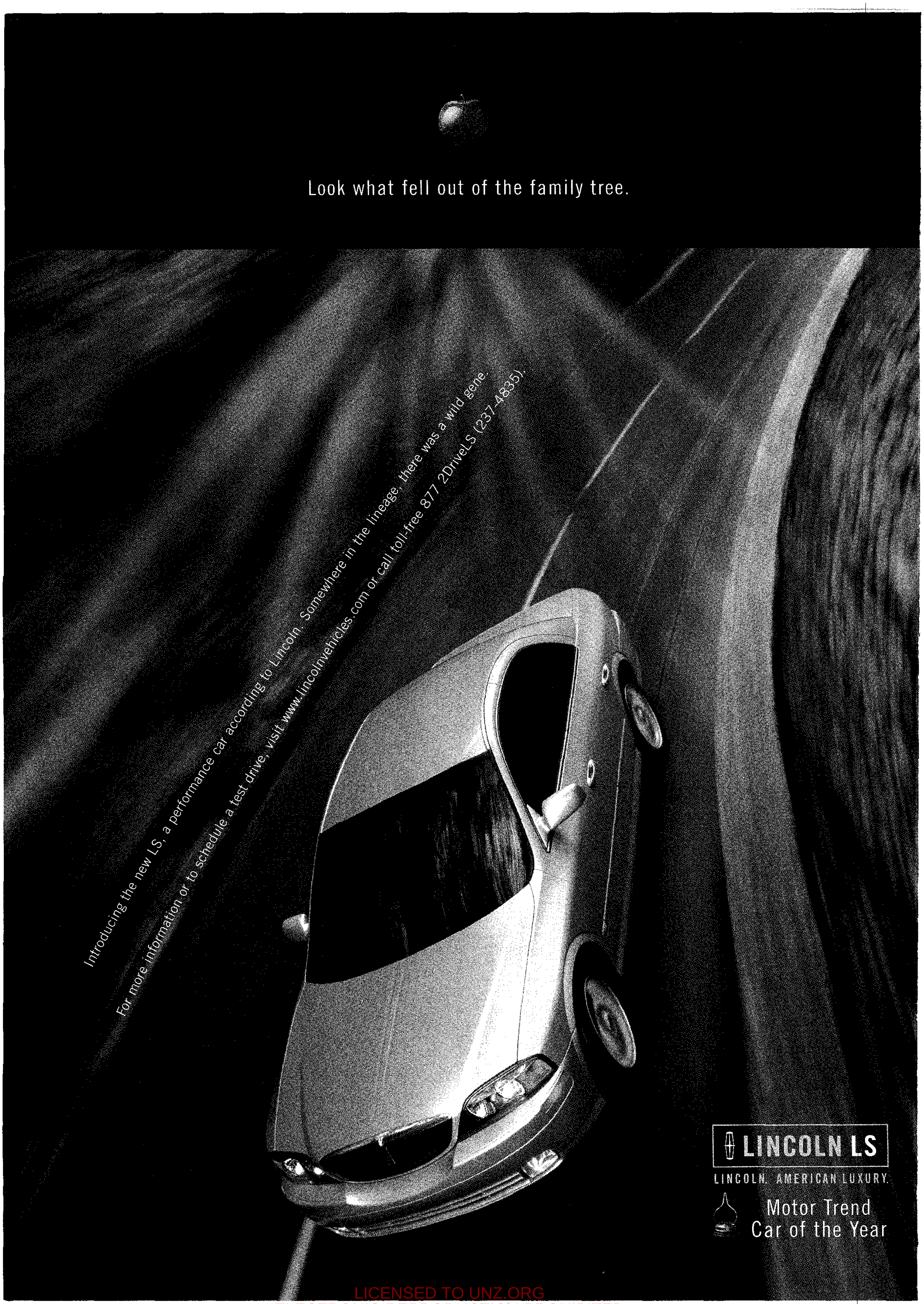

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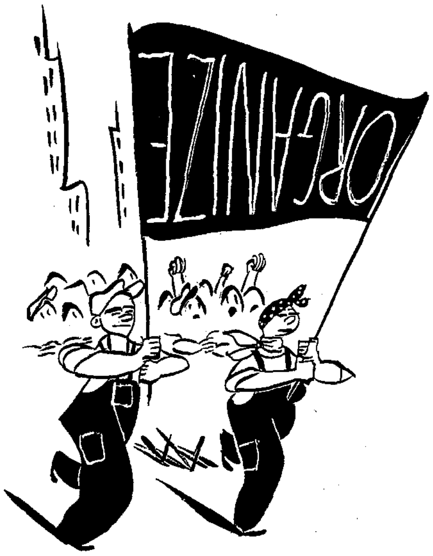
COMMENT
LABOR'S CHINA SYNDROME

For organized labor, last week's vote in the House of Representatives to establish "permanent normal trade relations" with China (that's the new, easy-to-swallow name for most-favored-nation trade status) was a disaster, and a self-inflicted one at that. Labor is surely right that the United States could do more to use its trade clout on behalf of human rights. But the defeat of the trade bill would have strengthened the most reactionary and belligerent forces inside China. At least, that was the dominant opinion among China's pro-democracy dissidents, who, by all accounts, welcomed the bill's passage as eagerly as their oppressor, the Communist Party, did.

American labor's problem, in any case, is not Chinese imports. And it's not that Chinese workers can't form unions. American labor's problem (and this is only a slight exaggeration) is that *American* workers can't form unions. The National Labor Relations Act of 1935—the Wagner Act—is still on the books. But it has been hollowed out by thirty years of court decisions and administrative rulings, and by the increasing willingness of employers to be ruthless. The legal deck is prohibitively stacked against the supposedly sacred right of workers to organize and bargain collectively. The law provides just enough protection to allow unions to maintain themselves in the steadily shrinking redoubts they conquered two and three generations ago but nowhere near enough to give them a fair chance to sign up new members.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

Yes, it's against the law for an employer to fire an employee simply for joining, or wanting to join, a union. But this is not the kind of law anybody gets arrested for breaking. If a worker fired for talking union seeks legal redress (with or without the services of a lawyer, whose fees cannot be recovered), then the offending company might, at worst, have to reinstate the worker and fork over his or her back pay—after subtracting whatever sum he or she has managed to pick up doing odd jobs in the interim. By then, two or three years will have passed, and the organizing drive will have long ago been crushed. This is what has happened over and over, year after year. And this, not trade with China, is why the unions' share of the private-sector labor force has dropped from thirty-five per cent in the mid-nineteen-fifties to under ten per cent today. It is also, by the way, why the only unions that have consistently grown in recent decades are unions of public employees. It's not that toll-booth attendants, clerks in government bureaucracies, and schoolteachers are by nature tough, hardened militants or have bulging, ropy forearms. It's that their employer, the government, is in a poor position to routinely and brazenly flout the plain language of the law. Private companies have fewer disincentives to lawlessness. Under these circumstances, a company that does *not* break the law is practically guilty of fiduciary irresponsibility to its stockholders.



What labor needs is not to torpedo trade abroad but to persuade, or to force, Congress to do some dental work on the laws that purportedly protect the right to organize. Suppose labor had used the threat of all-out opposition to China trade as a lever to get the Clinton Administration and the Democratic Party to commit themselves to putting teeth in the labor laws. Would the laws have been revamped this year? Hardly. If labor-law reform ever happens, it will happen only when there is a Democratic Congress to pass it and a Democratic President to sign it—and, even then, only if both have been elected with a mandate to make the law fairer. Meanwhile, though, the unions could be devoting their still formidable resources to educating the public about the grotesque unfairness of the current labor-law regime—rather than to lobbying an unsympathetic Congress in a cause as dubious as it was doomed—and they could now jump into the political campaign with enthusiasm. (Of course, the China trade bill would have passed. But that happened anyway, didn't it?)

As it is, many sensible people inside the labor movement worry about a repeat of 1994, when the unions, having dashed themselves on the rocks of another failed trade battle (the one over the North American Free Trade Agreement), went into a political pout that contributed to the takeover of the House by Newt Gingrich and his band of non-union contractors. Not long afterward, the A.F.L.-C.I.O. pushed out its somnolent boss, Lane Kirkland, and installed an insurgent team of leaders under John Sweeney. Despite the legal obstacles, the new leaders poured money and energy into trying to organize the unorganized. They got college students involved. They brought back some of the movement's old idealism. They cemented labor's relations with former allies, like blacks, and new ones, like environmentalists. They helped the Democrats gain House seats in the 1998 election—an unprecedented event for a party in the second term of a Presidency. It looked as if labor might be getting somewhere.

And now this. What a mess. What a sad mess. And it's sad not just for the unions. When the labor movement isn't drawing a bead on its own foot, after all, it tends to busy itself supporting things that are good for people who aren't even dues-paying members—things like health care and education. Labor's public-spiritedness is a rarity among "interest groups," and its concern for the suffering Chinese was no doubt genuine. But in this case labor wasn't selfish enough.

—Hendrik Hertzberg

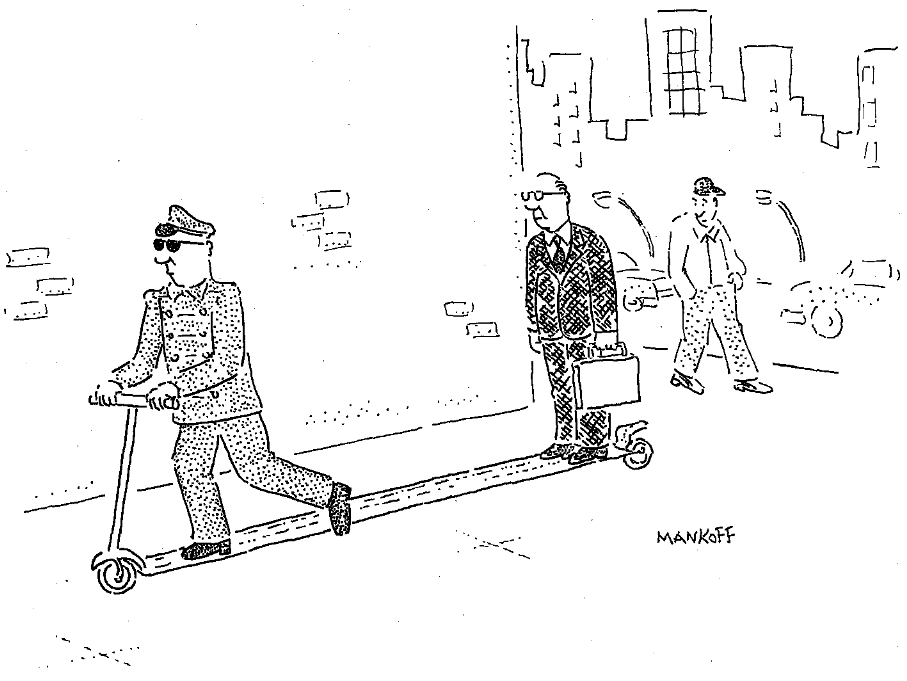
THE BOARDS
PUTTING ON A SHOW

"Such a Night," a jazz revue with songs by George Gershwin, Cy Coleman, and Kander and Ebb, among others, will be performed for the public this Friday at 6:30 P.M., in the auditorium of the Nightingale-Bamford School, on East Ninety-second Street. Emma Sheanshang, a senior at the all-girls school, arranged the music and plays the songs on the piano. Deborah Wolfson, another senior, directed and choreographed the show. They wrote the libretto together: it tells the story of three Jazz Age Débutantes who get lost on the way to the ball and wind up in a night club, where they mingle with hookers and meet some dangerously attractive men of a different class. Back in January, the girls cast eighteen of their fellow-students, and they have all been rehearsing three afternoons a week at Emma's family's apartment, which is in the East Eighties.

The "stage" for the last three months has been the Sheanshangs' library, because that's where the grand piano is. The once smooth walnut floorboards are now pitted with heel marks, and one of the glass globes in a hanging light fixture is chipped from an overenthusiastic dance move. The apartment's previous tenants had designed the place with a Moorish theme, and the Sheanshangs, who moved in three years ago, haven't got around to redecorating yet. The whole place feels a bit like a stage set, even without a bunch of teen-age girls twirling around it.

"Prostitutes, get ready for your dialogue!" Deborah called out during rehearsal one afternoon last week. The cast was doing a final run-through at the apartment, before moving into the school's auditorium. Six Prostitutes skipped into the library and took their places. Deborah was reading one part, because, she said, "one of our main Prostitutes is studying for her A.P. exam." The girls all carried black canes, and two had on bowler hats. A few were still wearing their pleated navy-blue school-uniform skirts but had changed into tank tops.

Emma is fair, with a round face and hair parted in the middle. Her cheeks were flushed from her exertions at the piano, which she played beautifully, with real feeling for the music. Her music teacher, Dr. Martin, who was sitting in on the rehearsal, said it amazed him that Emma had started playing only three years ago. "She fell in love with Gershwin and wanted to do something with his music for her senior independent project, so she decided to collabo-



rate with Deborah on a show," he said.

When the girls were casting the show, they were surprised by how little their fellow-students knew about Gershwin or Bob Fosse.

"They didn't even know 'They All Laughed!' " Emma said.

"We were shocked," Deborah added.

Deborah had on interestingly modern saddle shoes and wore silver rings on many of her fingers. She said Fosse was her idol. She had already mastered a nonchalant, Fossian directing style—you weren't sure she was paying attention, but then it turned out she'd been watching like a hawk all along.

Deborah will go to the University of Chicago in the fall, and she hopes to do graduate work at Oxford. After that, she wants to direct, both movies and theatre. Emma is on the waiting list at Harvard, "but I'm probably going to N.Y.U.," she said. "I want to keep studying music, because I might teach it one day, but what I really want to do is write fiction."

The Prostitutes and the Débutantes seemed to be in good shape. ("I'll give you guys notes tomorrow at school," Deborah told them after they performed "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise," one of the show's final numbers.) Mr. Fernandez, a Nightingale math teacher, who was playing one of the lower-class Lovers, sang "Too Darn Hot" well, but the two other guys, students from Friends and Columbia Prep, needed serious work. Emma was encouraging, urging them to try to "sing out" on the song "I've Got Your Number." "It's like this," she said, picking up the tempo.

We'll break the rules a lot
We'll be damn fools a lot.

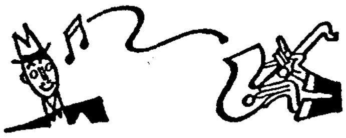
Deborah looked as though she were trying not to panic. She studied her fingernails, which were painted black.

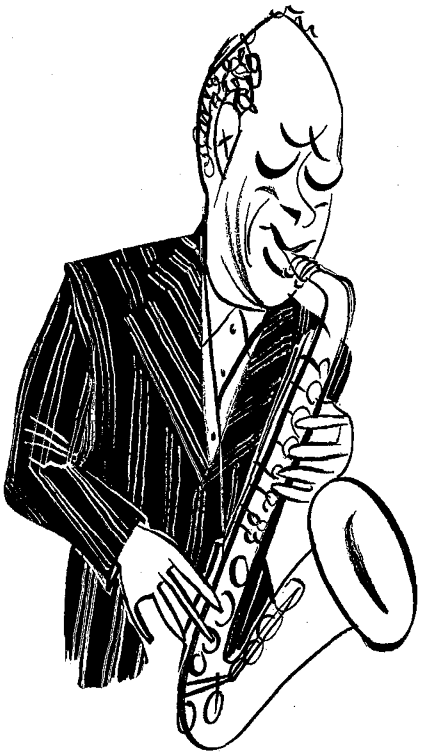
As the rehearsal wound down, Emma said they still needed to transpose one of the songs from the key of D into C, which is ordinarily a laborious process. One of the lesser Lovers piped up: "I can download that song from the Net, put it into Finale"—a software program—"and, bingo, it's in C."

Deborah gave him a theatrically cocked eyebrow, as if to say, "Maybe you're not such a lunkhead after all."

—*John Seabrook*

THE JAZZ LIFE
ORNETTE COLEMAN'S HARMOLODICS, AT HOME





Ornette Coleman

Ornette Coleman is seventy years old and lives in the garment district. By his own estimate, he has moved "no less than sixty-one times" since he came to New York as a young man, in the early sixties. To various neighbors and landlords, it has hardly mattered that he is a musical giant, as important to jazz as Jean-Luc Godard is to movies. Whatever apartment he has lived in—well, that apartment was instantly designated the epicenter of the avant-garde. Musicians from all over, from Mongolia, from Morocco, from Sardinia, from India, from China—even Jerry Garcia—have come looking for the avant-garde in Ornette Coleman's apartments, and he's welcomed them. Still, that didn't stop the neighbors from complaining and demanding his eviction. "Usually they said the music was too . . . too something!" Coleman said. And so over the years he has bounced around, from cold-water flats on the Bowery to a loft on Prince Street to modest hotels in midtown. He has slept in a friend's office when the need arose. "But you know something?" he said. "I am through complaining." Indeed, his new place is nothing to complain about. He's got lots of space now, room to live and play. The study even has a leopard-skin rug that Hugh Hefner would kill for.

Considering the degree to which Coleman's music has terrified critics and fellow-musicians over the years, he is an astonishingly warm and friendly presence. The first thing he does when you arrive at the loft, on West Thirty-sixth Street, is offer you "a nice glass of apple juice." One has a hard time imagining Miles Davis offering a stranger "a nice glass of apple juice." Coleman's smile is slight and wise. To shake his hand feels rather like holding a fluttering bird. He is a stylish man, and he wears a loose-fitting short-sleeved shirt that is as prismatic as one of his extended solos on the alto saxophone. His conversational style is diffuse, wandering from idea to idea, a little spacey—less like one of his solos than a rehearsal for something. He'll be talking about "the human condition" or "the idea that ninety per cent of music, except classical music, is race music," and the next thing you know, mid-sentence, he's ditched that thought for something else. "Try to follow me," he'll say once in a while. And you do, gamely. But Coleman is patient by necessity, as if he has come to understand, wistfully, that he occupies a universe only roughly parallel to everyone else's.

Over the years, Coleman has made dozens of records, but he performs rarely. He says he might perform more if he had an energetic booking agent who understood his music, but that's not the main thing. Coleman was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and played rhythm and blues and jazz all over the state. "As a teen-ager, I was hired to be a front man for a kind of gambling place," he said. "I would be out there playing and they were gambling, and when the Texas Rangers busted in there would be all kinds of fights and people trying to kill each other. I guess I was disillusioned about performing in a place like that, and I told my mother about it, and she said, 'Son, do you really think people are going to pay you to hear your soul?' "

There's no doubt that Coleman could book himself into the Village Vanguard or the Blue Note anytime and hold forth for a week or longer, but he has grown completely uninterested in playing clubs. "I guess I think that a night club is a good outlet for men and women who are strangers to each other and for them to have a little something playing in the background," he said. "But that's hard on a creative person. I'd prefer to present what I'm doing to people who are a little more familiar with each other and ready to listen. Like married people. You follow?"

Coleman's notion of "free jazz" is rooted in what he calls "harmolodics," and although he spent some time at his portable electric piano trying to explain it, it really is a hard theory to follow. What's clear is that Coleman is not interested in traditional ideas of melody and harmony as the singular basis for his music, nor does he believe in using traditional tunes as launchpads for his improvisations. "The only one I really went for is 'Embraceable You,' " he said. Considering both his achievement and the derision he's provoked, it's a wonder that Coleman has kept up his spirit for as long as he has. When Coleman's quartet was playing at the Five Spot Café forty-odd years ago, even Dizzy Gillespie couldn't follow the logic of "free jazz." "Hell, just listen to what he writes and plays," Miles Davis once said. "If you're talking psychologically, the man is all screwed up inside." Thelonious Monk, who was himself an explorer in sound, once remarked of Coleman, "Man, that cat is nuts!"

"What can I say? All I can do is play," Coleman said. He slid a tape into his sound system and played a thrilling new recording he's made with his son, Denardo, who plays drums; an Asian singer; Indian percussionists; and a bassist—an ineffable blend of India and bebop and funk. That music will be part of a program Coleman will put on Thursday evening in Battery Park. This is only his second concert here in three years.

"But I keep learning and teaching," Coleman said. "Who I am is not a lonely place to be. I'm not trying for approval or domination or control. Just music. Just recently I had a Korean student come to me and say, 'I want to play better than John Coltrane and better than you.' What could I do? I just said, 'C'mon in. Let's try. Let's get it on.' "

—David Remnick

TAKING PICTURES IN THE BELLY OF THE WORLD'S LARGEST CAMERA

An enormous black box, as imposing and stately as a king on a throne and bigger than some studio apartments, has taken up residence on the Lower East Side, in a storefront at 20-22 East Second Street. The box, twelve feet high, twelve feet wide, and sixteen feet long, is no ordinary container. It is the world's largest instant camera, and the only one of its kind. Designed by Edwin Land, the founder of Polaroid, and members of his Vision Research Lab in 1976, it used to be known as the Museum Camera, because for ten years it lived at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, where it took life-size photographs of paintings. Last year, the camera was downsized by the Polaroid company, but it has found new life in a new century. It also has a new name: Moby C.

The camera, which is capable of producing prints that are forty inches wide and up to a hundred and six inches long, did not make the journey from Boston alone. Mark Sobczak, a twenty-nine-year-old artist, who, along with an assistant, operates the camera, came with it. Sobczak had worked with the camera at Polaroid for five years, and when it was sold he asked the purchaser, a Canadian artist and filmmaker named Gregory Colbert, if he could continue his relationship with it. Sobczak, who says he thinks of himself as "the camera's heart and lungs," has to get inside Moby and "baby it along," making sure the composition and focus are exact, and manually advancing the film before the huge lens can be opened and the strobes fired.

Colbert intends to allow photographers to rent his new camera at a cost of two thousand dollars a day and three hundred dollars a print. Earlier this year, the photographer Catherine Opie became the first artist to use Moby since it arrived in New York, for a series of portraits of the performance artist Ron Athey. For days before the Opie shoot, Sobczak barely slept. Knowing how temperamental the camera can be (it behaves differently, for instance, in cold and hot weather), he worried about every possible thing that might go wrong.

When Sobczak is working inside the camera, he doesn't wear infrared glasses, preferring to maneuver in the dark, "using all my senses." And what an elaborate process it all is—practically medieval, judging from the torturous cranking and cutting and stretching that can be heard from the outside.

Opie knew that only a few artists had ever used the camera before—Chuck Close, Elsa Dorfman, and Lucas Samaras among them—and she was slightly apprehensive before the first shot. But, once she began photographing and was then allowed into the delivery room inside the camera to see what she had created, she was ecstatic. "Oh, my God!" she said. "Oh, yeah! All right! It looks great!" At one point, as Sobczak slowly peeled the negative away from a giant print, he startled everyone by shouting, "*This* is what this camera was made for!" Not only was the color dreamy and the detail extraordinarily rich but these instant photographs had, in the ninety seconds it took for them to fully develop (to "imbibe" the chemicals, as Sobczak likes to say), acquired the elegance of paintings.

The thirteen photographs that Opie took with Moby are currently on exhibit at the Thread Waxing Space, on lower Broadway. Word of the camera's presence in New York has slowly begun to spread. So far, William Wegman, David Levinthal, Joel-Peter Witkin, and José Picayo have expressed interest in working with it. Gregory Colbert says, "If Stradivarius had made only one violin, just think how precious an object it would be. Moby is a complete anomaly in a digital age. It takes you back to a time of glass plates or Flemish painting, and it enables you to remember what photography can be."

Weeks after the shoot, Opie was still exhausted—and still euphoric. "To pull that many images out was completely draining, but the whole experience was magical," she said. "I can't wait to use the camera again."

—Jonathan Coleman

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

CAN THE RECORD LABELS SURVIVE THE INTERNET?

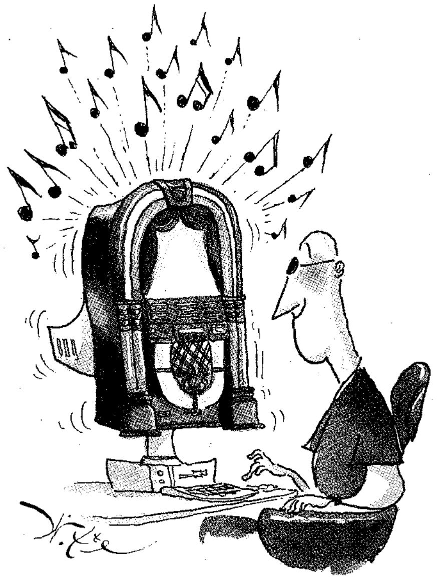
"You can get every record ever recorded!" the comedian Robert Klein used to promise in a spoof of those late-night K-Tel advertisements. Fifty tons of vinyl would be delivered to your door "before midnight tonight." Two decades later, an ad from the telecommunications company Qwest makes a similar offer, but now all you'll need is a single jukebox. We're still a few years away from that jukebox's becoming reality, but the necessary technology is in place. The question is whether the record industry as we know it will be around by then.

Welcome to the age of Napster. A computer application that a bored undergraduate wrote about a year ago, Napster allows you to download digital music files from the hard drives of other users. In its first nine months, more than ten million people have signed up for it. (It may be the fastest-growing service in the history of the world.) Want that new Pearl Jam song? With a trip to Napster, you could have it within minutes. You might call it stealing. But that's such an unpleasant word.

These days, the company has been making news because of all the high-profile copyright suits brought against it by Dr. Dre, Metallica, and others. Yet the copyright issues are a red herring; they will get sorted out, if only because Napster's very existence depends on a system in which Dre gets paid enough to make tracks for kids to steal. Napster's real significance is to have proved that downloading music isn't merely a fad, as most music execs had hoped. "If you want to talk about stealing, let's talk about record-company contracts," says Courtney Love, of Hole. "Stop the pious crap and figure out how we can use the Net to make the music we want." Robert Reid, the C.E.O. of the music portal Listen.com, casts the development in more global terms: "What we're seeing is the transformation of music from a physical product into pure media."

If record labels were just in the content business, they might not care so much about the format in which that content is sold. But the economics of the record trade have led the labels to act as if they were in the packaged-goods business. For all the industry's borrowed glamour, its revenue model owes more to Wrigley's than to MTV. As the Internet revolution surged through our phone lines and cables, the record companies stayed focussed on getting shelf space at Tower Records for their compact disks.

You could almost blame those overpriced Frisbees for the bind the industry is in. The advent of the compact disk was a godsend: although CDs are, if anything, cheaper to make than LPs, record companies have been able to charge twice as much for them. They should have known it was too good to last. CD pricing runs counter to a powerful trend: over the past century, entertainment has generally become cheaper and more widely accessible (think videocassettes and paperbacks). The compact disk is an anomaly, and, while it has been an immensely profitable anomaly, it has kept the major labels locked in a high-margin, low-volume business.



MICHAEL WITTE

For their sins, they got Napster—along with similar services like Gnutella and FreeNet—and the growing suspicion that the whole industry may have run its course on earth. That's probably too hasty. Despite all the "pay nothing for anything ever" rhetoric you sometimes hear, Napster users aren't taking a stand for freedom. They just want cheap music. If you lower prices, fewer people will steal. In at least one survey, a majority of Napster users said they'd be happy to shell out fifteen dollars a month for the service. Co-opting Napster, rather than shutting it down and having to deal with its successors, makes sense. But it would be only a stopgap measure.

To survive, the record industry is going to have to reinvent itself. A few years from now, it won't matter that the major labels can get shelf space in stores, because on the Net distribution is a cinch. But they do have expertise in promotion. More important, they have the ability to aggregate content, because they've got rights to immense musical catalogues. Together, the labels could offer, if not every song ever recorded, then something pretty close to it.

Imagine a scenario in which the labels establish a site offering unlimited access to all the music they own, old and new, for twenty dollars a month. The music files would be encrypted and of the highest quality, so you'd always know you were getting exactly what you wanted. (There are no such guarantees on Napster or Gnutella.) Once high-speed wireless Internet access became widespread, you'd be able to listen to any song from anywhere. The costs of producing and distributing physical goods would disappear. Revenue would come from both subscriptions and advertising. Think of how profitable MTV is—more profitable than any of the big record labels. Then multiply the number of viewers it has by five or ten times, and you'll get a sense of how lucrative such a service might be.

Could it happen? Well, the labels would face antitrust worries and the formidable antagonism of off-line retailers. There might also be competition from established artists like Courtney Love, who'd like to bypass the labels altogether. Still, the majors—and Sony and Universal have already been making the right noises—are best positioned to realize the dream of any song, anywhere, anytime. They'll have to upend their whole way of doing business to pull it off. But their whole way of doing business is going to be upended anyway. If the labels aren't willing to stand on their heads, they won't be left standing at all.

—*James Surowiecki*

SWANN
AUCTIONS

(details): Edward S. Curtis, "Native-American Warrior with Rifle," sepia-toned silver print, circa 1900. At auction June 15.

Signed first edition of Nabokov's third novel, "Despair," London, 1937, in dust jacket. At auction June 22.

Thurs June 15 10:30am & 2:00pm **Photographic Literature, Photographs**
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ILLUSTRATED CATALOGUE: $15

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THE POLITICAL SCENE

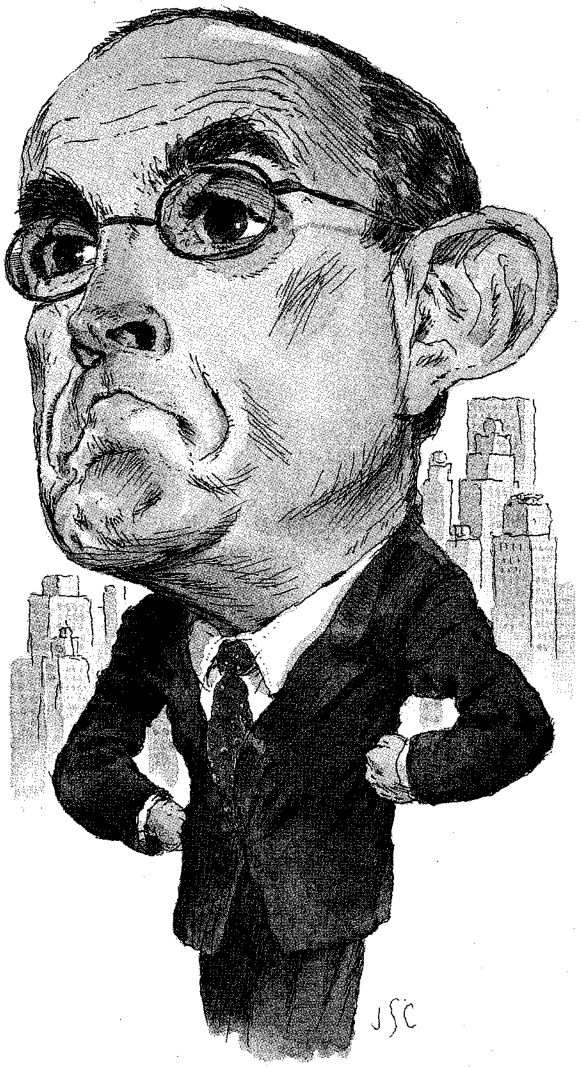
THE PROPHET OF LOVE

Rudy Giuliani gives up the fight.

BY ELIZABETH KOLBERT

Good-looking in a placid, boyish sort of way, Rick Lazio is the kind of politician who, at forty-two, still talks a lot about his mom. He lists as his outside interests guitar playing and numismatics, and when he says he has no skeletons in his closet one is inclined to believe him. This week, the Long Island congressman is to receive the nomination for United States Senate at the New York Republican Convention, in Buffalo—a development that his fellow party members must regard with a mixture of heartsickness and relief.

Lazio had always made it clear that he wanted to run for the Senate; still, his campaign has taken shape at an astonishing speed. Just twenty-two hours after Rudy Giuliani's withdrawal from the race, Lazio held a kickoff rally, in the gym of the West Islip High School, where campaign T-shirts with the slogan "Made in New York" were already on hand. The next day, after making the rounds of the Sunday-morning talk shows, he embarked on a two-day fly-around that in-



The Mayor's press conferences set a new standard for weirdness in New York politics.

cluded appearances in nine cities. When I caught up with him last week, at his final stop, in White Plains, his wife and his press secretary looked as if they were about to keel over. Lazio himself was exuberant.

"I put my Mets hat on when I was six years old," he told a cheering crowd on the small lawn of the Westchester County Republican headquarters, the very same line he had trotted out to similar cheers in West Islip, and presumably also in Buffalo and Elmira and Utica and Albany. "I have never needed an exploratory committee to figure out where I wanted to live. New York is my home once and for always. I am one of you."

It is perhaps peevish to complain about Lazio's lack of subtlety. One of the unwritten rights of a political nonentity is to define himself however he wants to, or, at least, however he can get away with. And there is, all things considered, something disarmingly modest about the case the Congressman is making. He may be the first politician to mount a native-son campaign for statewide office. "I've fished and clammed in our waters," he likes to say.

What's unnerving about watching Lazio has to do, rather, with the bizarre history of the race he is stepping into. Before Giuliani withdrew, he, too, loved nothing more than to taunt Hillary Rodham Clinton about her carpetbaggery, and, to the extent that he ever really mounted a campaign against her, the confected nature of her identity was at the heart of it. The Mayor not only anticipated Lazio's strategy, however, he also blew it to smithereens. For months, he ragged the First Lady about her Yankees cap, her Chappaqua home, her centrist posturing—her pretense, in short, of being something that she was not—only to discover at the very last minute that it was he who was living a lie.

Reporters who arrived at the City Council hearing room on the afternoon of May 19th came expecting to hear a dispirited Mayor drop out of the race. They were met by a prophet of love. "The reason I'm such a fortunate man is that I have people that love me and I love them, and they care for me and I care for them, and that's the greatest support that you can have in life," Giuliani said to the crowd. "I'm also very, very fortunate because not only do I have very good friends and people that I love and love me but I have a job as the Mayor of New York City, being the Mayor of the city that I love very much, people that I've always had a great deal of connection to and love for."

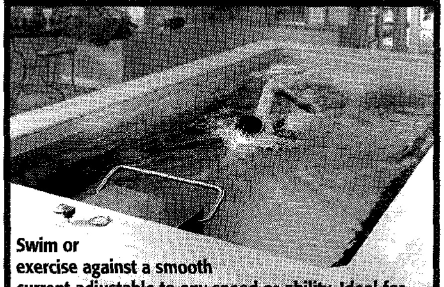
The next day, Giuliani gave a follow-up interview to Tim Russert, of NBC News, expanding on what his recent diagnosis of prostate cancer had taught him. "I tend to think now that love is more important than I thought it was," he said. "I think about all the love that I've received and it's amazing. . . . I've gotten thousands of letters giving me support, giving me love. And I think about the people that have to face this alone, without this incredibly large system of support and encouragement, and it has to be terrible."

The overriding message of all this—that love will make him a better mayor—would hardly be remarkable as a narrative of loss and recovery were it not for the fact that it contradicts just about everything Giuliani has ever said about himself, the city, and the nature of leadership. His philosophy, which some might say was always an elaborate rationalization for a reflexive bellicosity, took as its first principle the idea that sentiment has no place in the formation of public policy.

Only a few months ago, I watched the Mayor meet with some of the city's poorest and most desperate citizens. Most of them were welfare recipients, and they were begging him to sign a bill that would have made adjustments in the city's workfare program. As he sat in stony silence, they offered up tearful accounts of mistreatment, sexual harassment, and physical danger. Giuliani made not even a perfunctory show of sympathy. "I would be less than candid if I didn't say I'm inclined to veto," he said when the testimony was over, and that is exactly what he did.

The Mayor has often asserted that what liberals call compassion is really just a twisted form of guilt. Most of the programs of his predecessors, he likes to say, were inspired by such thinking, and, as he told a campaign gathering in April, amount to little more than giving "people some silly irresponsible slogan in their head that just makes things worse." At his most ambitious moments, Giuliani was willing to trace just about all the prob-

JOHN CUNEO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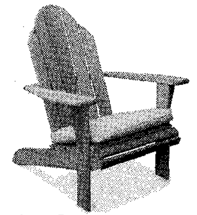
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lems of the inner city to one form or another of bogus, and ultimately self-serving, sentimentality.

The timing of the Mayor's withdrawal left Republicans exactly ten days to agree upon a replacement. It was, he reported, surprisingly difficult to resolve on a course of cancer treatment. "I didn't understand the impact of this," he said. "I thought of it as a budget—I know this sounds silly—but I thought of it like a budget decision or a legal decision." Giuliani's discovery was a moving one, but it came dangerously close to confirming the suspicions of his critics. Even at this most vulnerable moment, he seemed to be implying that making decisions that affect millions of other people was, for him, emotionally uncomplicated.

If the Mayor's epic farewell-to-the-Senate news conference set a new standard for weirdness in New York politics, it was only by beating out his farewell-to-Donna news conference, nine days earlier. On that occasion, he announced that he would be relying even more on his "very good friend," Judith Nathan, and was seeking a separation. One of the reporters present had the good sense to ask the Mayor how his wife of sixteen years felt about this development:

REPORTER: Is this a mutual place that you've come to—you talked about formalizing an agreement?

MAYOR: I don't know. I'm speaking—no, we haven't done that. I believe that that's what we should do, that that would be the best thing to do to protect our children, to protect ourselves, to protect everyone, and to maybe deal with it more honestly and directly.

Most sex scandals occur because of private indiscretions that become public. In Giuliani's case, it seemed to be the reverse: everything that was most damaging occurred in front of a bank of cameras. According to news accounts, Donna Hanover learned about her husband's decision only when she was called by friends who had been watching him on television. A few hours later, she summoned reporters to Gracie Mansion and, in a tone more of sorrow than of revenge, announced that he had wrecked their marriage with a pair of affairs, including one with his former press secretary. The Mayor refused to respond to these allegations, on the ground that his marriage, which he had finished off on live TV, was now a private matter. "Don't you realize that you embarrass yourselves by doing this in the eyes of everybody?" he growled at reporters one afternoon. The very next evening, he went out for dinner on the Upper East Side and cheerfully posed for pictures with his new "friend."

For his entire mayoralty, Giuliani has been the scourge of illicit pleasures, closing down the sex shops, banishing the hot-dog venders, even trying to enforce the laws against jaywalking. All along, his faith in his own moral compass has never wavered. Much like Angelo in "Measure for Measure," who sets out to impose the death penalty for fornication (and then propositions a woman training to become a nun), the Mayor often seemed to derive a certain icy satisfaction from pointing up the frailties of others. New York Republicans, confronted with his infidelities, struggled to explain away the hypocrisy. One county chairman I spoke with gamely argued that the Mayor's conduct wasn't really duplicitous because, as everybody knew, his marriage had been a sham all along.

For his part, the Mayor never even acknowledged the contradiction. Usually quick to assign blame, he has, on the subject of his own marital difficulties, been magnanimous to a fault. "The fact that we've grown independent, we've grown more separate over the years—who knows why those things happen?" he mused. In dropping out of the Senate race, he rejected the suggestion that sex or scandal had anything to do with it. "This decision is a health decision," he said categorically.

If the Mayor's withdrawal speech had the tone and structure of a confession, it was, of course, to a different lapse entirely, and this substitution was the truly inspired element of his performance. At this point, it doesn't really matter whether reporters were convinced by his conversion narrative, or by his promise to be more inclusive. Instead

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of being asked about how and when and why he cheated on his wife, Giuliani is now being confronted with much less awkward questions, about his spiritual awakening.

"There is luck, good luck and the luck of the Clintons," William Goldschlag observed the other day in the *Daily News*. Not long ago, the consensus in New York politics was that the First Lady is a deeply flawed candidate who is running a mediocre race. Now the consensus is that she's a deeply flawed candidate who is running a mediocre race and is likely to win the election.

Last week, Mrs. Clinton continued to campaign much as she always has, speaking at a Boys and Girls Club in Mount Kisco, a union convention in Albany, and a senior citizens' center in Mount Vernon, but the jagged terror that characterized her operation for so long was gone. Lazio may well turn out to be a formidable opponent—polls already show him narrowing the gap with the First Lady—but the race has clearly lost its sense of high drama. In Mount Vernon, one of Mrs. Clinton's aides was asked whom she was rooting for in the N.B.A. playoffs, and he was relaxed enough to joke that although she was a longtime Bulls fan, she had, of course, also always had a soft spot for the Knicks.

At the senior center, the First Lady seemed cheerful and self-assured. She voiced her support for helping children and old people; people who take care of children and old people; and, finally, people who have no one to take care of them at all. Afterward, she called some bingo numbers and then walked over to speak to members of the press, who were roped off in the back. One reporter asked her about Lazio's recent criticisms. She furrowed her brow and pursed her lips. "I'm going to continue to do what I've done, and that is to run a positive campaign about the issues that I've been talking to people here at the center about," she said. "I've been a little disappointed. I thought it was unfortunate that he seems to be running a campaign of insults."

While Mrs. Clinton was working the room, I spoke with about a dozen of the bingo players, and with each one I tried out Lazio's nativist argument. Responses ranged from "If you can come in and do the job, that's what counts" to "Americans are transient people" to "It takes guts to move to a new state." One youthful-looking retiree went so far as to suggest that it might actually be better for New York to have a senator unburdened by an overintimate knowledge of local affairs. "I've always been one who thinks you can see things much better from a distance," she said.

Last winter, when I asked advisers to the First Lady how they planned to deal with the problem of her carpetbagging, they said they wouldn't really need to, since after a few sightings of her buying groceries in Chappaqua it would simply cease to be an issue. At the time, I found this notion laughable, but, like so many of the most cynical political predictions, if the senior center is any guide, it has turned out to be true. In this sense, Lazio's current strategy may be not just ham-handed but quite possibly also self-defeating. One can claim to be the real thing for only so long before it starts to seem just another posture.

Even at the darkest hour of the Mayor's indecision, all the Republicans I spoke to said they preferred the sick and wounded Giuliani to the bushy-tailed Lazio. Obviously, this was a reflection of the Mayor's name recognition, his record of achievement, and his huge war chest, but it was also a reflection of his innate talents. Too headstrong and self-destructive to be considered a master politician in conventional terms—it's unclear at this point whether he has left himself any future in politics at all—Giuliani, at least before he discovered love, knew how to swing a tire iron. When he took a swipe at Mrs. Clinton, it was in the spirit of spoof rather than of self-affirmation, and he never confused the absurdity of her position with a justification for his own. We will miss him. ♦

From the Baltimore Sun.

Maria Hjorth tied her career low round with an 8-under 64 to take a two-stroke lead in the U.S. LPGA event in Otsu, Japan.

Hjorth, who has been fighting all week with an airline that lost her golf clubs, made three birdies on the front nine and five more on the back side.

On second thought, keep the clubs.

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

REUNION SCHEDULE

BY CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY

Thursday

1-4 P.M.: Registration: Welcome back! Discover that all the classmates you wanted to see have cancelled and aren't coming! Not to worry! Now you'll have plenty of time to get to know the ones you've spent the last twenty-five years avoiding!

6-7 P.M.: Drinking!

7 P.M.-midnight: Dinner and more drinking! A chance to "break the ice" by expressing joy over having travelled thousands of miles to spend time with people you no longer have anything in common with!

Friday

8-10 A.M.: Breakfast. "You'd better put something in your stomach!"

10-11 A.M.: Welcome talk by President Lootin: "The New Millennium and How Much More of Your Money We'll Need." President L. will explain what the university has been doing with the money you have already given, and why it desperately needs more despite the fact that its endowment tops seven billion dollars. During the talk, development officers will pass Bloody Marys and pledge cards.

11 A.M.-noon: Faculty lectures.

"Fund-Raising in Ancient Mesopotamia." Dr. Harmon Beedlemeyer, of the Archeology Department, will show slides of early cuneiform donor-pledge forms, which made Babylon U. the finest educational institution of the sixth century B.C.

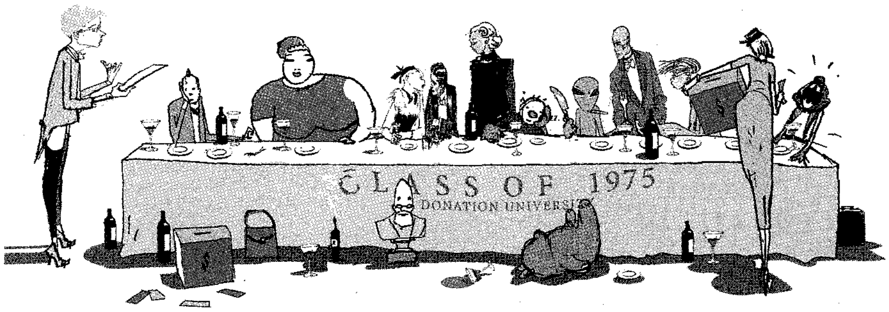
"Sexual Potency and Philanthropy." Dr. Pashtar Singh, Professor of Behavioral Medicine, has spent the last twenty years studying the effect of giving away money on virility, and has discovered startling connections.

12-1:30 P.M.: "Puttin' On the Feed Bag!" (Lunch.) The same food you remember, only this time washed down with plenty of alcohol!

2-6 P.M.: Panel discussions. Classmates who have done better than you in their careers will discuss why, and whether it's too late for you to do something about it.

7-8:30 P.M.: "Booze Cruise!" Cocktails on board the good ship Alma Water.

8:30 P.M.: Dinner. A warm supper will be served by current financial-aid students who hate you. Our after-dinner speaker is author Blaise Waimerd, who will regale us with stories about famous authors she has slept with.



ISTVAN BANYAI

10 P.M.-midnight: "Hail! Hail! Rock and Roll!" Dance the night away at our authentic re-creation of a college mixer. This time, at the end of the evening, you're guaranteed sex. (As long as you go home with your spouse!)

Saturday

8-10 A.M.: Hangovers, recriminations, and a scathing lecture from your spouse.

10 A.M.-noon: More panel discussions.

"If Drugs Are So Bad, How Come We Had So Much Fun?" Dave (Nickel Bag) Bender leads a discussion. (Note: Space limited. Reservations required.)

"This Is It?" Dr. Jacques Rien, of the Philosophy Department, discusses why your life peaked twenty-five years ago and whether you should kill yourself.

"Leave It to *Us*!": University lawyers explain the tax advantages of bequeathing your estate to the university, instead of to heirs who secretly despise you while pretending to love you.

12-2 P.M.: "Déjeuner sur Herb." The Old Quad is transformed into the French countryside, complete with cows and cow by-products. Catch up with old friends while drinking "blush" wine from the brand-new upstate New Hampshire vineyard of classmate Herb Risko.

2-5 P.M.: Seminars.

"La Cage au Moi!" Margot (Mark) Lanham discusses his transformation from shy English major to transgender night-club sensation. Don't miss his hilarious impression of Attorney General Janet Reno: "Elián! Elián! Auntie Janet, she is coming to get you!"

"We Regret to Inform." Julie Figg, Director of Admissions, discusses why your child didn't get in, despite all that money you've given. Julie will also explain why *you* wouldn't get in today, either.

"Winning Isn't Everything!" Coach Fred Putsolatso explains why the football team hasn't won a game since our fifth reunion. Jim Dimmer, from Alumni Development, will follow with a presentation showing how we *can* win—if we give the school more money, so it can recruit from among the nation's leading juvenile-detention facilities!

7-10 P.M.: Luau. Burmlee Dining Hall goes Hawaiian with (real!) sand and (fake!) palm trees. Extremely strong rum drinks will be served by Alumni Development officers, along with durable power-of-attorney instruments.

Sunday

Noon: "We'll Do Lunch!" Ceremonial exchange of numbers and promises to get together before another twenty-five years go by!

12-4 P.M.: Departures. Attorneys and security personnel from Alumni Development meet with you to go over your—irrevocable!—financial pledges. Once all instruments are signed (three witnesses, please!), notarized, and entered at the County Courthouse, you'll be given back the keys to your car. See you at the thirtieth! ♦

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LETTER FROM PHILADELPHIA

NO MAN'S TOWN

The good times are killing off America's local élites.

BY NICHOLAS LEMANN

I had a little trouble finding Willard Rouse's office in Philadelphia, because it is in a negatively denoted location—across the street from a giant hole in the ground. In an old town house, a business suite has materialized for the purpose of overseeing the construction of a monumental performing-arts center, Philadelphia's answer to Lincoln Center. Rouse, a nephew of James Rouse, the man who figured out how to turn down-at-the-heels urban waterfronts into "festival marketplaces," and so set off the reinvention of the American city as a recreational site, chairs the project. He swept into what must have once been the living room of the town house, now given over to a conference table, and assured me that I hadn't kept him waiting.

"I was raising bloody hell!" he said cheerfully. He grabbed my notebook and drew, on a blank page, a rough cross-sectional plan of the overhanging balcony in the main concert hall. Hidden inside the overhang was a heating-and-air-conditioning duct. The problem was how to get to the duct to repair it after the building was finished. The architect and the contractor, Rouse said, wanted elegant, old-fashioned plaster on the wall outside the duct, and a series of metal plates at regular points to give repairmen access to it. Having finished his sketch, he gave me a look to communicate that this was idiocy of the most obvious sort.

"Who fixes ducts?" Rouse asked me. "Plumbers! I said to these people, 'Have you ever seen a plumber's hands? Plumbers have dirty hands! They're gonna put their dirty hands all over the plaster when they screw off the plate, and you can't wash dirt off of plaster, and pretty soon it's gonna look like dog shit! You can't do it that way.' They said, 'O.K., then we're gonna have to move the duct.' I said, 'No, you're gonna have to move me! Find. Another. Fucking. Way.' "

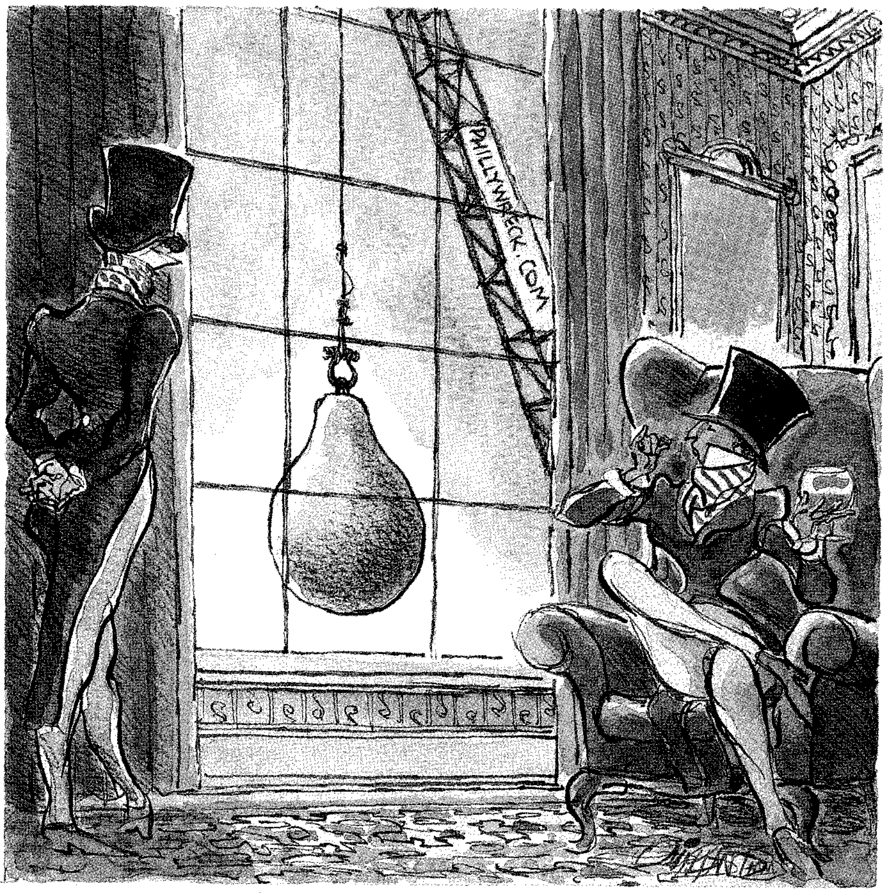
Rouse is a big, restless man with a gravelly, cigarette-cured voice and fly-away hair. He was wearing a dark suit without the jacket, a button-down shirt, a fancy tie, and tortoiseshell glasses, but this came across as a Clark Kent getup that might at any moment pop off in an explosion of ungovernable developer energy. Behind him hung a wall-size banner listing contributors to the performing-arts center. An extremely tall crane, nested in the soft subterranean dirt of the construction site, loomed just outside the window. The story about the duct was clearly meant to communicate not anger but joy—to get me to see him as a colorful, larger-than-life guy at the top of his game. And he is.

The national economic boom, after all these years, has come even to dear old Philadelphia. In the aftermath of the triumphant eight-year mayoral term of Ed Rendell, the city government has gone from quasi-receivership to solvency. Beginning in 1997, the city—not the metropolitan area but Philadelphia itself—began showing a net annual gain in jobs, reversing the trend of decades. Philadelphia won the competition to be the site of this year's Republican National Convention. Real-estate prices are rising. Private schools are oversubscribed. Small technology companies are springing up. The section of the city where we were, off Broad Street just south of City Hall, formerly a conveniently symbolic boulevard of broken dreams, because of the presence of enormous empty buildings like the old Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, has been rechristened the Avenue of the Arts. Just across Broad Street from the town house where Rouse and I were talking, Tom Stoppard's most recent play, "The Invention of Love," which New Yorkers haven't been able to see yet, was playing to full houses. New restaurants had sprouted up and down the street. And these were just the preliminaries, because the performing-arts center, which is meant to be the anchor of the neighborhood, isn't scheduled to open until December of next year.

Rouse himself nearly went broke in the early nineties, at the same time as the municipal government. Now he's back. He has just built a new office tower in Center City Philadelphia, the first one in years, but he has staged most of his comeback out in the suburbs, in a seven-hundred-acre office-park complex, which he developed, with the unconvincingly rustic name of Great Valley. The surrounding area, along Route 202, in the farmland beyond the old commuter towns, is Philadelphia's Silicon Valley.

The performing-arts center was started when the board of the Philadelphia Orchestra, prodded by the conductor, Riccardo Muti, began raising money for a new building. But that plan had stalled, in part because the traditionalists on the board wanted the symphony to stay in the lovely old Academy of Music building. Meanwhile, Mayor Rendell had been raising money for a new arts building of his own, but that effort had stalled, too. Rouse was part of a group assembled by Rendell that merged the two projects into one: a much bigger, more expensive, and flashier project than either side had imagined, containing two big performance spaces encased in a shimmering arch of glass. "People have to understand—P. T. Barnum has to be part of the game," Rouse told me. "It's not culture for culture's sake. You know, 'Build it and they will come'? That's bullshit! Build it and sell the hell out of it, and they will come!"

Philadelphia reached its peak in importance in the late eighteenth century, when it was the largest city in North America. It has never dropped out of the top five American cities, and you can get a sense walking around it today of a long period of equipoise situated somewhere between Colonial times and now. Philadephia had a garment industry, an oil industry (oil was developed commercially first in Pennsylvania, later in Texas), and a publishing and advertising industry. It was a manufacturing center. Stetson hats and Botany 500 suits and Philco appliances and Breyers ice cream were made there. *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies' Home Journal* were published from a stately brick building overlooking Independence Hall. Philadelphia was a sports town (it once had two baseball teams) and a political-machine town and a union town. It was an African-American town: W. E. B. DuBois's "The Philadelphia Negro" was the first case study of a black community in the United States. It was home to the Pennsylvania Railroad—to buffs, the most glorious of the lines in the glory days of railroads—and the famous "traction" (streetcar) companies owned by the Widener and Elkins families.



In cities like Philadelphia, the rich are getting richer—and losing control.

PAT OLIPHANT

Sitting atop this peaceable kingdom was a group that one of its members, the sociologist E. Digby Baltzell (best known for popularizing the term "Wasp"), called Proper Philadelphians. In "Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class," published in 1958, Baltzell gave us a city that was tightly under the control of a defined coterie whose members blended social and economic prestige with a ruthless efficiency that enabled them to engage in "the exercise of power over other men in making the decisions which shape the ends of a predominately business-oriented social structure." In other words, Baltzell's people didn't just go to a lot of débutante parties; they also ran the place.

These people lived in town at Rittenhouse Square, or at the outer reaches of the city in Chestnut Hill, or in the beautiful Main Line suburbs spread out along the railroad line. One thinks of their houses as having been hewed from blocks of stone, because they looked so solid and permanent. They rowed at the Vesper and played golf at the Merion Cricket Club and foxhunted at the Whitemarsh Valley Hunt Club early on weekday mornings, arriving at work ruddy and a little late. They kept their money at the Girard Trust or the Provident Trust, invested at Janney Montgomery Scott or Butcher & Singer, and took out business loans at the Philadelphia National Bank or the First Pennsylvania—all institutions run by men who had been born or carefully assimilated into the group. They served on the boards of the symphony and the art museum and the University of Pennsylvania and the hospitals. It was their city.

In this way, Philadelphia, with its powerful local establishment, was like most American metropolises. And, like most American metropolises, it isn't this way anymore. We are living in an age in which, as Manuel Castells, a Spanish-born sociologist-planner who teaches at Berkeley, puts it, "the space of places" has been superseded by "the space of flows." Money and information ricochet freely and instantaneously around the world—and with particularly intense force and velocity in boom times. One associates the toppling of establishments with busts, as in the case of the Great Depression and the group that Jay Gatsby was yearning to join. But today it is the boom that is toppling them, by buying and trading the institutions they formerly controlled. Philadelphia is for sale, which means that, as a place, it will become at once more prosperous and less autonomous—less in control of itself. As Castells puts it, "A growing social schizophrenia has resulted between, on the one hand, regional societies and local institutions and, on the other hand, the rules and operations of the economic system at the international level." If you understand the national boom mainly in terms of what's happening in Silicon Valley and on Wall Street, and perhaps also in terms of people left far behind in the ghettos and factory towns, you're missing how much it is altering the way American life is organized.

There are a few cities, like Seattle and Austin, where the new economy is producing a coherent neo-Baltzellian group, except with hiking boots and stubble. Not so in Philadelphia and most other places. Philadelphia's rising companies, situated on or around Route 202, can't perform the same function as the old ones for all sorts of reasons. The employees don't interact with each other, as in urban settings, because the area where they work (and other areas like it around the country) is laid out in the form of office campuses accessible only by car. Two of the most prominent and rapidly growing Philadelphia companies, for example, are Vanguard, the mutual-fund empire, and QVC, the home-shopping television network. Both serve national markets from isolated locations in the suburbs. The same goes for suburban Internet businesses like VerticalNet.com and Safeguard Scientifics. Brian Roberts, the head of QVC's parent company, Comcast, has recently taken on a major civic role, as the co-chair of the organization that brought Philadelphia the Republican Convention—along with the new performing-arts center, the most obvious symbol of Philadelphia's comeback. (The other co-chair, David Cohen, a lawyer who was Ed Rendell's right-hand man in City Hall, says that "he agreed to do it only because it was national.") The idea of what an American city should be has changed completely from the days of "Philadelphia Gentlemen"—conforming now, in effect, to the ideas of James Rouse, who built HarborPlace in Baltimore and preached a gospel of the city as "a garden for people to grow in" rather than a center of commerce, finance, manufacturing, and transportation.

THE LIZARD

At the last restaurant on the road to Pisa airport
The only thing under the pergola to distract me
From gnocchi stuffed with walnuts in porcini sauce
Was a greeny lizard curving her belly like a bowl
So that when she tucked her hind legs behind her
In philosophical fashion and lifted up her hands
As though at prayer or in heated *conversazione*
She wouldn't scorch her elegant fingers or toes
On the baking concrete and would feel the noon
As no more than a hot buckle securing her eggs.
We left the restaurant on the road to Pisa airport
And flew between Mont Blanc and the Matterhorn.
His lady co-pilot, the captain of our Boeing
Coyly let us know, specialized in smooth landings.

—*Michael Longley*

So where did the Philadelphia business aristocracy go? I put this question to Martin and Margy Meyerson—he a member of the pioneer generation of academic experts on cities, who became the president of the University of Pennsylvania, she a city planner and a veteran of many civic activities. The Meyersons were not born into Digby Baltzell's Philadelphia élite, but they came to town when it held sway, and they made a point of winning a dual life peerage. Both of them, in their late seventies, are fully vested Proper Philadelphians, but now they find themselves in a situation where the members of the club are standing with their noses pressed to the window, looking at the world outside, because that's where the deal goes down, rather than vice versa.

The Meyersons invited me to come as their guest to one of the regular monthly meetings of the Sunday Breakfast Club, a venerable organization that, for some funny old Philadelphia reason, meets not for breakfast on Sundays but for dinner on Wednesdays, at the Union League of Philadelphia, a club on Broad Street. Before the dinner, I went over to their house and talked for a while. They live a couple of blocks west of Rittenhouse Square—on the same street where I met Willard Rouse—in a large Victorian brownstone. Inside, there were spacious rooms with high ceilings, filled with books and art objects from all over the world, the bounty of a long upper-academic life. We sat down on low couches in the living room. There was a grand piano in the corner. A copy of Noel Annan's "The Dons" and a vase of fresh flowers sat on the coffee table.

Martin Meyerson, a small, almost elfin man, formally dressed, with a formal manner, had done some thinking in advance. "We have a President who is justly proud of the performance of the economy," he said, by way of starting the conversation, "but we have to explore what the patterns mean for the places that are not New York or Los Angeles or San Francisco. What goes on in Philadelphia, once a grand city? How is it doing? What are its successes and its difficulties?"

We got onto the subject of the Philadelphia institutions of the period when the Meyersons first arrived, more than fifty years ago. Martin Meyerson began ticking them off. "Drexel & Company was the great merchant bank, an affiliate of J. P. Morgan," he said. "It was run by the head of one of the great aristocratic families."

Over the years, the Philadelphia companies began to disappear. For example, there was Scott Paper, whose board of directors Martin Meyerson served on for many years. "A first-rate company," he said. "A little stuffy, but a first-rate company. It was run for a generation by Thomas McCabe, an important figure. A trustee of Swarthmore College."

"A good solid Republican," Margy Meyerson said.

"Yes, but one would say a Republican with a sense of the commonweal. Was he chairman of the Fed?"

"Yes."

"He was chairman of the Fed. Do you know Digby Baltzell's book?" He meant not "Philadelphia Gentlemen" but the more locally controversial "Puritan Boston and Quaker Philadelphia," published in 1979. It's an exercise in invidious comparison which presents Philadelphia's élite as inferior to Boston's, and puts the blame on Philadelphia's Quaker heritage. "I take some issue with it, but I'm flattered to be one of the people it's dedicated to. Well, Scott Paper became a great international company. Then Mr. Dunlap came in"—that's Chainsaw Al Dunlap, the king of the corporate downsizers. "His aim was to get the quickest return on the company—to turn it into a salable firm. You might say this is what capitalism is all about. But the prevailing view was that a local firm should not be treated with such abandon, although many of the stockholders came out rather well. And then he didn't like Philadelphia, so he wanted to move the company."

"Was it Clearwater? Bradenton?" Margy Meyerson said.

"No, Boca Raton. He moved it to Boca Raton."

"Slash and burn," Margy Meyerson said. "It was sold to Kimberly-Clark. The stock went up a lot. But it didn't do the city any good."

We moved on to the local banks. "You could argue that now there is no major Philadelphia bank," Martin Meyerson declared.

"There was Philadelphia National," his wife said.

"Yes. It was not quite as important as the banks in New York or Chicago

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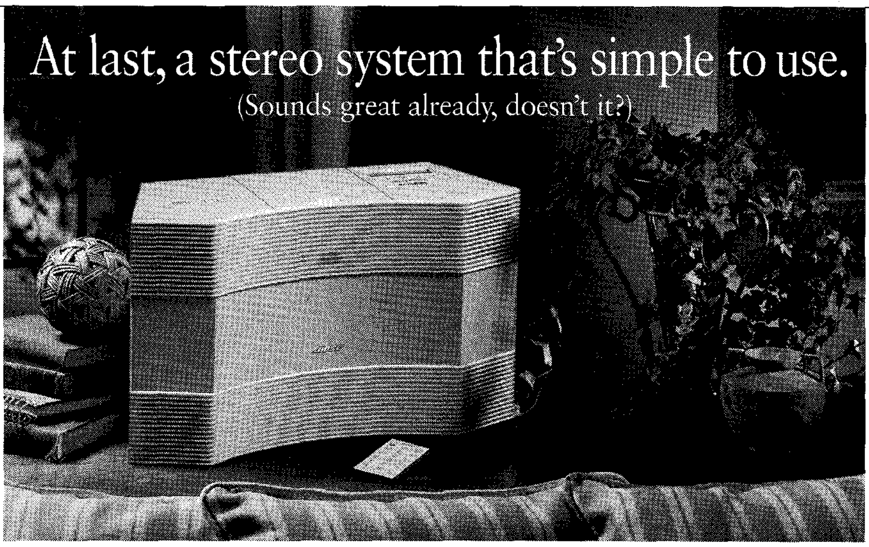

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or California. But nonetheless it was important."

"One certainly knew the old banks."

"They weren't all necessarily run by old Philadelphia families."

"It's very sad to see your banks change," Margy Meyerson said, "because they have a visible presence, architecturally, showing solidity and presence in the community."

We went out into the spring evening, hailed a taxi, and rode the short distance to the Union League, which, as it happens, is right next door to the former downtown headquarters of Drexel & Company—now a Bally health club, where slender people in leotards can be seen through the windows of the former banking floor cheerfully bobbing up and down. Inside, we put on nametags and walked up a broad stone flight of stairs to a cocktail reception, where the Meyersons introduced me to many of their friends. Thacher Longstreth, the world's most aptly named person, was there—a towering seventy-nine-year-old Republican city councilman with a shock of white hair. I met Charles Dickey, who had run Scott Paper after Thomas McCabe, and G. Morris Dorrance, who had run the biggest bank in town for many years and is related to the Dorrances who founded Campbell's Soup. The current heads of these companies were not present. Somebody rang a bell, and we went in to dinner, where we heard Anita Summers, a retired professor of public policy at the University of Pennsylvania and the mother of our nation's Treasury Secretary, discuss education reform. I'm not allowed to tell you what she said, because the speeches delivered at the Sunday Breakfast Club are off the record. I sat across from a delightful man named Charles Grace—think of Dickie Greenleaf in "The Talented Mr. Ripley" if he had in fact been persuaded to return home and then a few decades had passed—who told me that he works in a "family office," having formerly been employed by Drexel & Company.

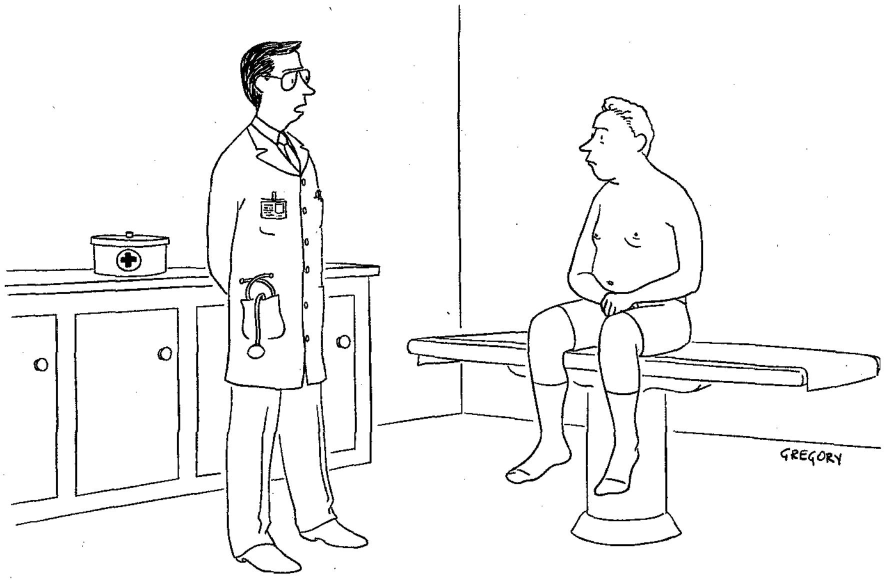
Some of what became of the old Philadelphia is the result simply of a familiar development—the decline, or the relocation, of manufacturing. That explains the disappearance of Stetson and Philco and most of the local garment industry. The more recent part of the story, though, has to do with the advent of a vast international-asset souk in which practically everything is constantly being traded.

Just in the past ten years, wonderful years for Philadelphia, a large part of the Philadelphia Navy Yard was sold to an Anglo-Norwegian concern that plans to leave the shipbuilding business, so it will probably be closing down. SmithKline, the Philadelphia pharmaceutical company, merged with a British company called Beecham; in January, the new company, SmithKline Beecham, announced plans to merge with the British company Glaxo Wellcome. Of the two big local oil companies, Atlantic Richfield has long since moved to Los Angeles, and, more recently, Sun sold its exploration division to an Italian multinational.

The local phone company, Bell of Pennsylvania, became part of Bell Atlantic, which then merged with NYNEX, forming a new company with headquarters in New York. The Philadelphia Electric Company is about to become part of Commonwealth Edison, out of Chicago. CIGNA, one of the leading local insurance companies, recently sold off its property-and-casualty division to a Bermuda-based concern known as the Ace group. The two flagship Philadelphia department stores, Wanamaker's and Strawbridge & Clothier, were both sold to the May Department Stores Company, of St. Louis. One of the four big health-care systems in town, Allegheny, went bankrupt and was bought by a for-profit Santa Barbara company called Tenet. Breyers was bought by Unilever and left town. The commission for the new performing-arts center went not to Philadelphia's greatest architect, Robert Venturi, but to an Argentine named Rafael Viñoly.

Meanwhile, the conductor whose idea the new center was, Riccardo Muti, was acquired, so to speak, by La Scala, in Milan, and he has left town. The most prominent black leader in Philadelphia, William Gray, the minister and former congressman, has become the head of the United Negro College Fund and now spends most of his time in Fairfax, Virginia. (The new mayor, John Street, is trying to assume Gray's mantle.)

Drexel & Company wound up as part of the eighties junk-bond firm Drexel Burnham Lambert, which was forced into bankruptcy by federal prosecutors. All the other old Philadelphia investment houses—W. H. Newbold, Butcher & Singer, Janney Montgomery Scott—long ago ceased to be independent entities. And perhaps the rudest of the shocks of the boom years has been the sudden disappearance of all the major local banks. The Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, once the biggest



"Your infection may be antibiotic-resistant, but let's see how it responds to intensive litigation."

thrift institution in the country and for many years the owner of Philadelphia's tallest commercial building, which used to hand out little savings envelopes to children in the Philadelphia public-school system, went under in the savings-and-loan crisis. Now the Mellon bank, of Pittsburgh, owns it, and the building is being made over into a hotel. Mellon also bought the Girard Trust, whose domed headquarters on Broad Street is going to become a hotel, too—both hotels affiliated with national chains, of course. The Provident National Bank was sold to another Pittsburgh banking company, P.N.C.

In the eighties, the biggest bank in Philadelphia, Philadelphia National, turned itself into a regional bank called CoreStates. At the end of 1997, a regional banking company from Charlotte, North Carolina, First Union, announced that it had purchased CoreStates, so the leading banking company in Philadelphia was now gone.

If you saw the movie "Trading Places," you may remember a scene set inside the magnificent, soaring main room of a Philadelphia bank, with a second-story colonnade punctuated by Roman busts and a stained-glass window depicting the founding of the American republic—that's now First Union's downtown branch office. The old, august, possibly too powerful board of directors has been downgraded to a "regional advisory board." This is an especially ironic outcome, since in the early nineteenth century both the First and the Second Bank of the United States were headquartered in Philadelphia. The abolition of the Second Bank, by Andrew Jackson, ushered in a century and a half of elaborate government-mandated dispersion of power in the banking industry, so that Philadelphians wouldn't control money and credit in every other city. Over the past few years, these banking laws have been steadily dismantled in the name of economic efficiency, and the result is that now Philadelphia's money is controlled by people in Pittsburgh and Charlotte.

The takeover of CoreStates by First Union was probably the rockiest of Philadelphia's many mergers during the boom times. First Union has laid off about half the people on the CoreStates payroll—nine thousand people—and closed or sold half of the five hundred CoreStates branches. Four hundred thousand local customers have taken their business elsewhere. The stock is way down. Now many Philadelphians believe that they will wake up one morning and read that First Union itself has been acquired, or has sold off the former CoreStates to an even bigger national banking company.

In "Philadelphia Gentlemen," Digby Baltzell said that the function of the Philadelphia Club, which he called "the oldest of the well-known metropolitan men's clubs in America" (founded in 1834 and housed in the same building, on Walnut Street, since 1850, and therefore older even than many of the men's clubs in London), is "to maintain a continuity of control over important positions in the business world." It sure didn't look that way, though, on the afternoon I went there to interview Fred Heldring, the retired chairman of the old Philadelphia National Bank. Aside from the doorman, he and I seemed to be the only people in the building. There was an empty reading room downstairs, and a row of empty guest dining rooms upstairs. We met in a small library with a heavy oak table and oil portraits hanging on the walls in the spaces between bookshelves. Heldring is a man with big, clear, unblinking blue eyes, a blocky head, white hair, and dark bushy eyebrows, who speaks emphatically—in italics.

Heldring, who was born to a banking family in the Netherlands, came to Philadelphia to study at the Wharton School of Business, and got a summer job in the transit department at the Philadelphia National Bank. The company's house organ published a story about him, because an immigrant employee was so exotic. After it appeared, he was summoned by Graydon Upton, the head of the foreign department, who said that he had known of the Heldring family in Holland and that Fred should please come see him about a job when he finished at Wharton. Heldring remembered the day quite precisely: "I was sitting waiting for him on the banking floor. There were no offices in those days—the officers sat behind desks out in the open. It was *such*

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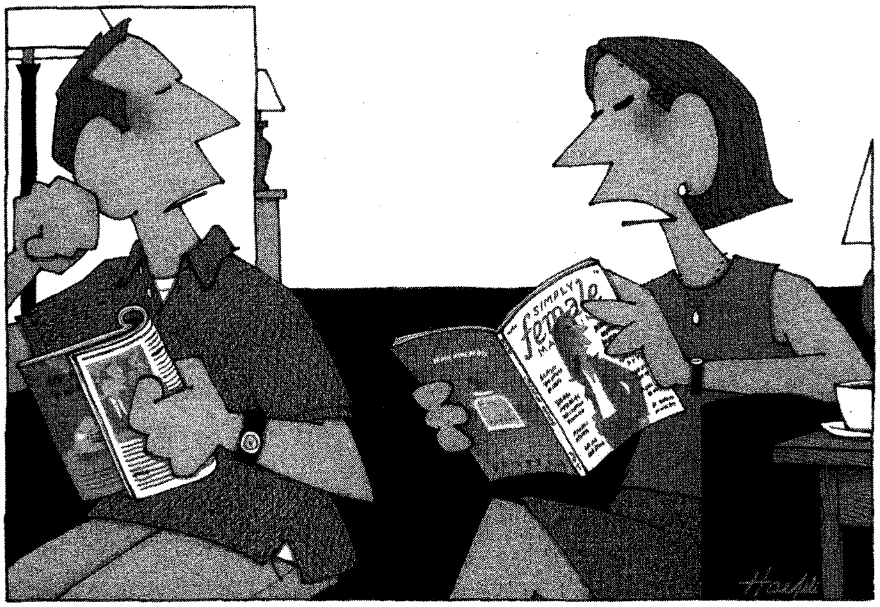

"There's an article in here that explains why you're such an idiot."

• •

a slow tempo. The head of the foreign department was asleep at his desk. People walked *so* slowly."

He went on, "When I started in banking, you were *totally* secure of your position. You would have to *steal* to be fired. They didn't let anyone go, even in the Depression. There was no pressure on earnings *at all.* There was pressure to be the first to reach a billion in assets. There was no great pressure to perform. The board was made up of gentlemen. *Gentlemen!* Mostly native Philadelphians. Today, it's earnings, earnings, earnings, earnings."

There is a Web site for former employees of CoreStates which is full of sentimental postings about the vanished days of Philadelphia banking. The chief complaint in the postings is that all decisions are made in Charlotte, often according to computer programs that determine which loans to approve and which branches to open and which services to offer at what price. The secondary complaint is that First Union and the other new outside companies don't care about the civic life of Philadelphia. People told me that you can't fill a nonprofit board of directors in Philadelphia these days. An organization called Greater Philadelphia First, founded in the early eighties to be a benign civic oligarchy of chief executives, such as many American cities have, today has only four of the original twenty-three member companies represented on its board.

One ought to be wary of the idea that locally controlled banks and businesses are best suited to look out for the interests of ordinary people in their communities. Philadelphia's poor neighborhoods were hurting just as much before it became a branch-office city as after. Whether you have access to a loan officer matters less because now there are direct-mail, credit-card, and small-business-loan companies. When the local banks and companies go, the real effect is on the local grandees—people who, because of the boom, matter much less than they used to. Texas no longer has a big locally controlled bank. Los Angeles doesn't, either—or a morning newspaper. In the last decade, Boston has lost many of its big banks and its leading daily paper to out-of-town owners. The people who used to control these institutions are not suffering economically: they own stocks and real estate that are soaring in value. They have gone from being Baltzell's "business aristocrats" to being *rentiers.*

In their previous incarnation, they might be thought of as a little bit of sand in the gears of American capitalism—an ironic position, because they ran and profited from capitalism locally, and believed in it. Yet they also represented the introduction into business life of minor inefficiencies, such as the diffusion of economic power into regional structures, and of not strictly business considerations, like social lineage and the promotion of civic projects. Losing control of their institutions will, oddly, make them more purely capitalistic, not less. Their connection to the economy is now a much simpler and clearer one: the search for the highest possible return on investment.

During the twentieth century, there was quite a lot of sand in the gears of the economy. Powerful labor unions were sand in the gears. So was entrenched corporate management that didn't pursue stockholders' interests with absolute ruthlessness. Heavy government regulation, which forced airlines to serve small markets and utility companies to be local and banks to limit themselves on the basis of geography and the services they could offer, was sand in the gears. Now we've cleared the sand out of the gears, and economic change will be able to make itself felt quickly and without impediment.

In most cities, the tableau will be something quite similar to the one Philadelphia presents: General prosperity. Downtown transformed into an entertainment site operated by national leisure-time companies. Business growth, also of national firms, in the distant suburbs. The late-middle-aged and the uneducated made superfluous. The poor neighborhoods depopulating, and getting poorer. More people with money. Fewer people with power.

Thus far in American history, rapid economic change and concentration of power have provoked strong, unpredictable reactions. People feel left out and try to use politics and government to slow down the pace of change and to build in intermediate structures that will protect them. Just beyond all those wonderful macroeconomic statistics and vast new fortunes, the boom, by so profoundly streamlining America's operations, is creating propitious conditions for a powerful counterreaction—with the goal of putting some sand back in the gears. The counterreaction could just as easily come from the right as from the left. But don't be surprised when it happens. ♦

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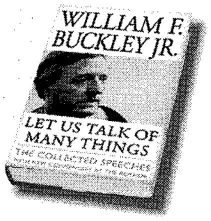

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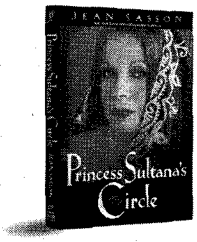

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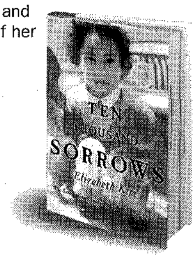

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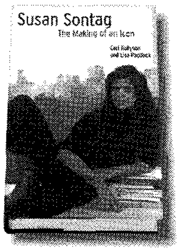

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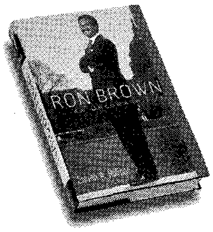

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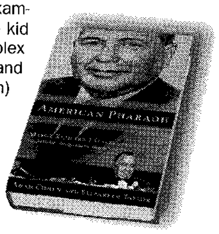

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PROFILES

DELTA NIGHTS

A singer's love affair with loss.

BY BILL BUFORD

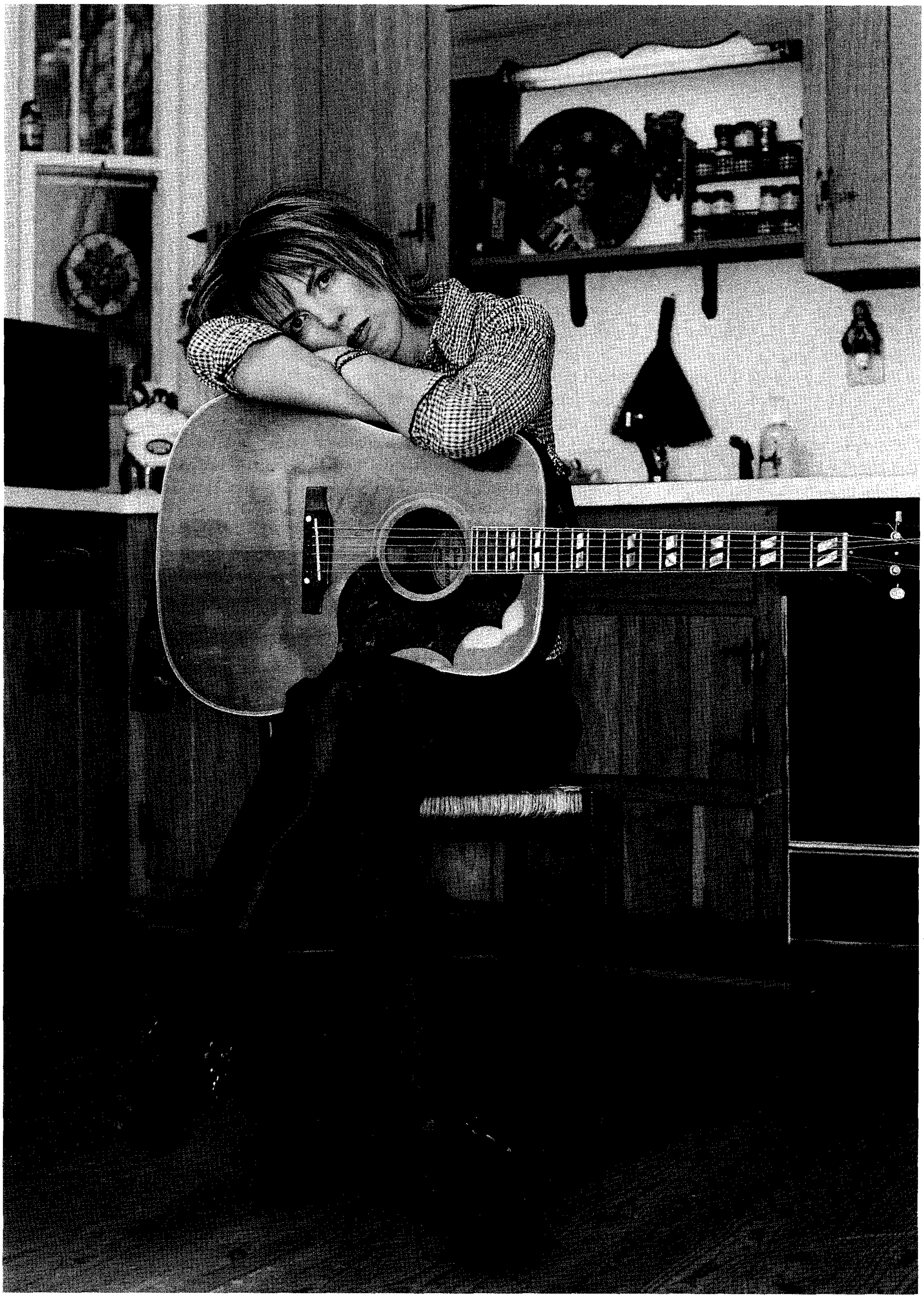
It's a damp Delta night in January, and we've pulled into Lambert, in Quitman County, Mississippi, at one time a modestly prosperous cotton town, now reduced to a rather curious thing. The railway station—stripped down and operated in an only-one-man-needs-to-run-it kind of way—is still functioning as an agricultural freight stop, more or less as it always has, but it seems to be the exception. The town center consists of two rows of Main Street-like buildings, vaguely Victorian in design, relics of nineteenth-century antebellum cotton commerce, almost all of them abandoned. One of these would have housed the barbershop, or the bank, or the post office. Now they're home to whomever, whatever, anybody, nobody. One was the Rexall drugstore. (The "x" in Rexall has broken off.) The feeling of the place is of impoverished improvisation, variations on a squatter's theme, and Lambert's empty buildings have been taken up by anyone who has the know-how to crack open a padlocked door and get the electricity turned on. As we pull in, flames leap out from a corner, the only light on a street without street lights: it's a barbecue, the pit constructed from fallen loose bricks, right out on the sidewalk. The town seems to be deadly desolate, and yet, weirdly, it is also busy with people.

It's Saturday night, and we're in the heart of the heart of the Delta, the homeland of the blues. Our drive began in Clarksdale, near the birthplace of Muddy Waters, and continued through the very crossroads where Robert Johnson, seventy-two years ago, was supposed to have done his legendary transaction with the Devil, exchanging his soul for a satanic facility on guitar. And for half an hour we've been on county highways, all straight lines and right angles, cutting through plowed fields of cotton and soybean, seeing no other vehicles, no people, no lights except the distant dull blue of a farmhouse television, and then this explosion of busyness, in this place near no place, an embellished dot on a road map. We park, get out. Main Street is thrumming—a heavy, amplified bass coming from behind a number of boarded-up storefronts. We pick a solid, thickly painted door, which gives after I push against it, and it opens up to the sweet, acrid smell of a woodstove, a smoky array of blue and green lights dangling from an overhead pipe, and, atop a stage in the corner, a sixty-year-old man in a two-piece suit and brown patent-leather shoes—Johnnie Billington playing electric guitar.

This is the first stop on a visit to Delta juke joints, and it's impossible not to be impressed by that profoundly unmodern, unreconstructed feeling that you still find in the South. I'm here because of an interest in Lucinda Williams, the Louisiana-born singer and writer, and although she isn't with me tonight (she's in Nashville, singing with the North Mississippi All Stars—as it happens, a Delta blues band), the Delta has served Williams as a highly personal, emotional reference library, something she keeps coming back to in her music, for images or metaphors or, sometimes, for its famous twelve-bar arrangements and its flattened blue notes. Williams is forty-seven, and, obsessively working and reworking a small collection of tunes, has created a concentrated repertoire of around three dozen exceptionally powerful songs. For a thirty-five-year effort (Williams began playing when she was twelve), that works out to about a song a year, and it's still possible to see a live show in which she gets a little carried away—and she always seems to be on the verge of getting a little carried away—and hear almost the entire œuvre, as was the case about eighteen months ago at New York's Irving Plaza, when Williams's encores went on longer than the act, and the audience emerged, after nearly two and a half hours, thoroughly spent, not only by the duration of the program but also by the unforgiving rawness of the songs. They're unforgiving because they are so relentlessly about pain or longing or can't-get-it-out-of-your-head sexual desire, but most often they're about loss, and usually about losing some impossible fuckup of a man, who has got more charm and charisma than a civilized society should allow, and who never lives up to any of the promises he made when he was drunk, on drugs, in lust, in love, incarcerated, in pain, insane, in rehab, or, in some other essential but frustratingly appealing romantic way, unaccountable. He's usually from Baton Rouge, Louisiana (and a bass player), or from Lafayette, Louisiana (and a bass player), or from Lake Charles, Louisiana (and a bass player), or maybe from Greenville, Mississippi (and a bass player), and the songs come across as both very Southern and also painfully autobiographical. Ouch! you think after you've heard Lucinda Williams for the first time, this girl has gone through some shit. Her songs are not traditional rock and roll, if only because they are more written, more preoccupied with the concerns of language and image, than most rock tunes. They're not country, although there is an occasional twangy country element. They're not folk, even though "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road," her 1998 album (and her first commercial success), got a Grammy award for the best contemporary-folk record of the year. And they're not blues, even though they are informed by something that might be described as a blues attitude.

This quality of being both one thing and another (and yet another) is at the heart of Williams's achievement—thus the knotty, contradictory labels she gets stuck with, like the blackest white girl in Louisiana (or the white woman with a black man's soul), or Raymond Carver with a guitar (because of her stark narratives), or a female Hank Williams. At some point, I started asking her colleagues

SABA

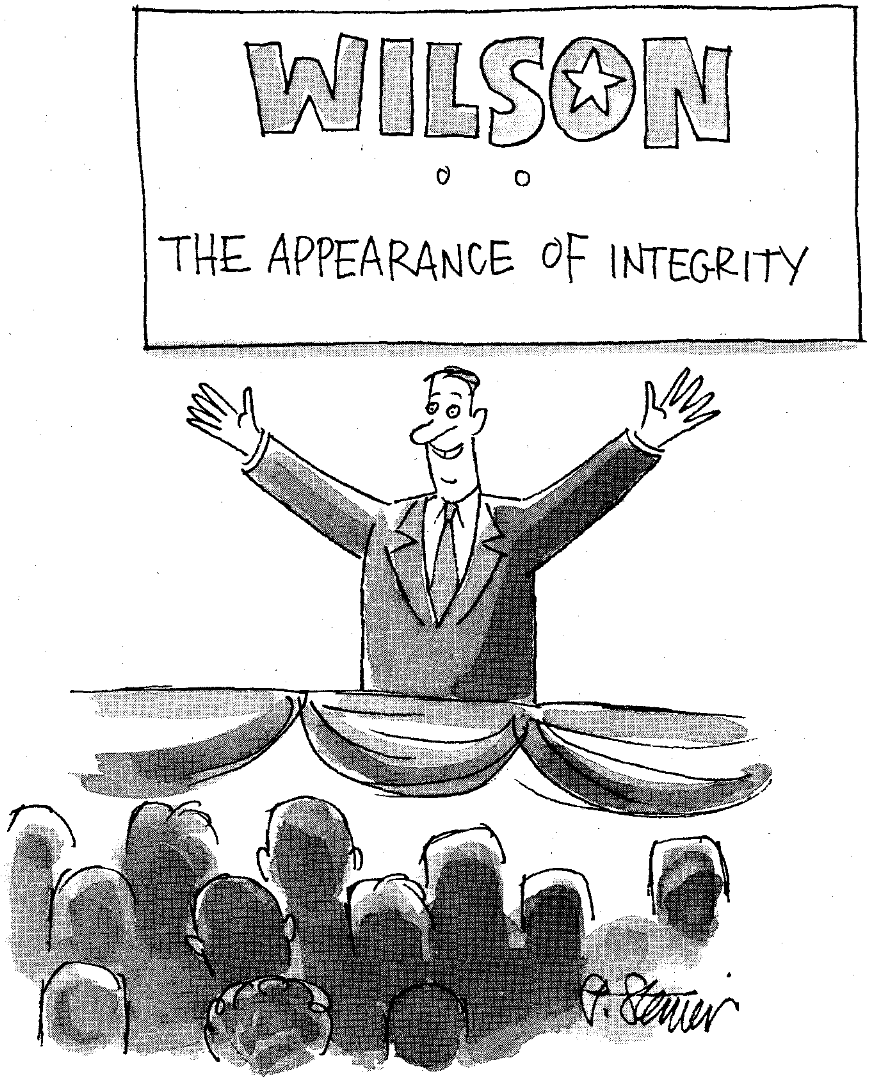


Lucinda Williams, in her home in Nashville. "Clyde is dead. And Frank is dead. What a thing." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

to characterize her music and was met with a kind of stuttering bafflement (gruff-speaking Gurf Morlix, for instance, who worked with Williams for eleven years and wrote most of the guitar hooks on her songs, paused for a long Marlboro Man, spit-out-your-tobacco minute and said, “Shit, I never thought about it as anything except the music of a genius, but I don’t know what it is”) until I was rebuked for even trying by Hobart Taylor, a champion of Williams going back almost to the days when she wore a granny dress and sang on street corners: “Don’t even go there,” he said. “It’s a trap.”

Whatever this music gumbo might be, the blues remains one of its spicier ingredients—thus this visit to the Delta, where, after Johnnie Billington surrenders the stage to younger colleagues, including a teen-ager on bass who is hunched over in pain from what people are saying is a degenerative spinal disease, and a keyboard player so diminutive that his head disappears behind the piano, we wander out, get back into the car, and eventually find ourselves on a long dirt road, a shortcut to some place where, if we’re lucky, we might catch the last set of Robert Walker, another aging giant of the blues. The woman in the back seat with me is telling me that I need to be careful, that Saturday nights in the Delta are wild. There have been gang killings, and trouble between whites and blacks, and it might be advisable for me to stick close, because, she says, whispering in a tone that is meant to be reassuring, she’s got a loaded pistol in her handbag, and, you know, hey, shit happens.

After miles of empty fields, a church appears on our right, a white clapboard shoebox, resting atop brick stilts, nothing else in view, and then, a few minutes later, we turn, and, just before the town of Bobo, we come upon the Holmes Grocery & Diner, a square building with white bulbs draped across its awning like Christmas lights, a gravel parking lot, and a big barn of a room in the back.



When Lucinda Williams was starting out, she sang “country blues” (unlike the urban Chicago variety), the kind that would have originated in places like this Bobo juke joint, and her first album, recorded in a single afternoon in 1978, consisted only of classics by the country-blues masters—Robert Johnson and Memphis Minnie, of course, but also an ancient shuffling geezer called Blind Pearly Brown, who used to play wizardly guitar sitting on a stool on a street corner in Macon, Georgia, on Saturday afternoons, when six-year-old Lucinda was a mesmerized member of the audience. And although the blues are no longer a feature of her concerts—with the exception of a slow rendering of Howlin’ Wolf’s “Come to Me, Baby,” which she performs as an encore, with a slippery sibilant last line (“Slide a little love in me”) that transforms a simple tune, sung originally by a man, into a womanly erotic declaration—they seem always to be present in some way. This Holmes Grocery & Diner in Bobo, for instance, is remarkably similar to the juke joint pictured on the cover of Williams’s “Car Wheels” CD, another shoebox in the country, with Christmas lights, looking utterly ordinary, pushed back into the corner of the photograph, behind a dirt road (in that inimitable Southern way, which finds its aesthetic not in what is pleasing or symmetrical or obvious but in the miserable thing that—indirect, off center, out of focus—is distinguished by its overwhelming authenticity).

The Holmes Grocery & Diner also calls to mind a song from that last CD, “2 Kool 2 Be 4-Gotten,” a hymn to the Magic City juke joint, in Rosedale, Mississippi. (The title is written just as it appears on one of the juke joint’s walls.) Again, the tune is not actually a blues number but something inspired by the blues, and while it seems to be musically evoking the place it describes—starting off with a slow percussion, the stress in the back, in a syncopated funk style, the drum just behind the beat (in a way that musicians often describe as a Southern sound), laid back, very cool, very juke—what Williams had in mind was the way Beat poets performed their work, with someone on drums and someone playing a bass, and a guy in front reading a poem, singsongy but still spoken. The tune is a recitation, a series of images: the signs mounted around the place ("House Rules, no exceptions. No bad language, no gambling, no fighting. Sorry, no credit. Don't ask"), the graffiti in the bathrooms, the gang rivalries ("June bug vs. hurricane"), and the essential amorality of a joint that's an escape, beyond accountability, and where shit happens.

The next morning, the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., I drive out to Rosedale, wanting to see the place that informed the song. Rosedale is built against the levee, the houses of the whites, west of the interstate, with driveways and lawns, and the homes of the blacks, on the other side, crowded, higgledy-piggledy, ramshackle, the timber of the porches and doorways disintegrating in the Mississippi air, an unchanged, unchanging picture that could have been taken any time in the last hundred years. This part of town is full of churches—the Gospel Temple, the Riverside United Baptist, the God's People in Unity, the Assembly of God—and I stop at one, a garish thing with turquoise walls and pink window frames and a white steeple, a great cotton candy of a place. I decide to join the well-dressed families, rushing across the parking lot, late for the eleven-o'clock service, and as I step inside everyone at the back turns to stare. I feel I've transgressed, and leave, but as I walk back to the car it occurs to me that I've been composing a selective, romanticized picture in my head. I made notes the night before, describing the highly sexual bump-and-grind dancing at the juke joint in Bobo, but I wrote nothing of the fact that half the people were fat, no-neck whites—croupiers and kitchen staff from the riverboat casinos. I note that, when we walked in, the band was playing "Mustang Sally" but not that it got bored and suddenly quit mid-tune, in seeming disgust at its audience. I describe Robert Walker, sitting against a wall, tired, possibly ill, a tall man in a draping white suit, white spats, with a Little Richard bouffant hairdo, a shiny white guitar, and a long melancholy face, but not the two white people who were sliding around the joint, "inconspicuously" trying to get the good angle in order to take his picture—this Delta postcard shot—including the man whose camera had an elaborate fashion-photo attachment, with a hooded white canopy above his flash, plus all sorts of high-tech gizmos spread across his table. And even in Lambert I noted the cheap-and-cheerful assortment of chairs, the cracked floors, the New Year's decorations that still hadn't been taken down, but not the banner stretched across the back of the stage: "Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts."

DADDY-GIRL

I am in Lucinda Williams's bedroom, and have been struck by a number of things. Above the headboard, and nailed to the wall, is a shiny, glitter-sprinkled, heart-shaped pink valentine from Jesus, who is depicted inside a diminishing succession of crucifixes, like so many Russian dolls, as pretty and effeminate, with a golden halo and dreamy blond hair. I don't think I've ever seen Jesus as a blond. Even so, it makes you wonder: Do you want God above your bed? There is a matching valentine alongside; in this one, Jesus is a brunet. Hanging on the wall by the bathroom is a similar arrangement, this one devoted to the Virgin Mary, a shrine of sorts, including an image that changes shape as you walk past: one moment it's the Virgin, and then—what do you know?—it's the Son of God! This house seems perfectly normal, almost suburban, from the outside—a two-story brick-and-wood affair, set back from the street, in a birch forest, in a semirural district of Nashville (Emmylou Harris lives two doors down)—but inside it's a floor-to-ceiling museum of Southern religious kitsch. There is a wall mounting of Jesus in a conch shell and another of Jesus inside a scallop; as you come up the stairs, you are met by a painting of exceptional ugliness, featuring an eye and a clock (the second hand pivots from a point in the pupil) and a piece of text, written in silver glitter, declaring that we love thee, O Lord, "at all times!" High on a kitchen wall is a cross that says "Bless Our Home," and if you look closely you can see a tiny amplifier, which, when triggered by the vibration of the screen door closing, plays a blast of a choir singing "Hallelujah!" On the refrigerator are magnetized bottle caps with a minuscule likeness of Jesus painted inside, decorated delicately with tiny gold stars and red glitter.

There are snakes. One has such oily-looking scales that I can't resist touching it. Several are rather abstract: stretched across the wall is a particularly crude thing that, in keeping with the governing aesthetic, is painted turquoise. (Many things in the house—including a Jesus night-light—are turquoise.) These are not actually snakes; they are serpents. Raving reverends, preaching the Gospel between bouts of gargling strychnine, walk barefoot atop serpents, not snakes. A joke, I assume. Or is it? Upstairs, in Lucinda's study, I discover that serpent handlers are a special interest, and she has photographs and books about people whom I can only regard—forgive me, O Lord—as insane weirdos.

What is her attitude toward all this? I can't tell; I'm not sure she knows. She owns photo collections of juke joints, hillbillies, cross-eyed Appalachian sharecroppers, rural pig guttings, preachers in a trance, the faithful showing off their fang scars, dumb-ass farmers displaying their guns, and Shelby Lee Adams portraits of sprawling families crowded onto buckling porches in places like Hooterville and Happy. At one moment, I wonder if she collects a certain kind of friend. During a five-day stay in Nashville, I meet a man named Dub Cornett, and then later both Lucinda and Richard Price, her boyfriend of nearly five years (and her bass player), whisper into my ear that Dub is from a family of backwoods hillbillies—"the real thing." On another evening, I'm introduced to a young songwriter named Hayseed, who stays with Williams when he has business in town but still lives with his Pentecostal family. He, too, I'm told, is "the real thing." I wouldn't think twice about them except that later, going over a press file of pieces about Williams, I notice that Dub and Hayseed were trotted out to meet journalists on some of those occasions, too. Is a point being made? The eccentric friends, whose authenticity is in their extreme Baptist intensity; the serpent handlers; the poison drinkers; the turquoise Jesus; the glittery Marys. Is this another illustration of that odd, indirect Southern aesthetic of miserable originality? (It might be white trash, but it's ours.)

Williams is of modest height (five feet four), and slim, almost preternaturally so—"It's the thing I share with my dad. I've always been a rake." Dad is the Arkansas poet Miller Williams, the beanpole figure you might have spotted reading at Bill Clinton's second Inauguration; his poems are hanging on the walls, including one written for Lucinda's boyfriend when he turned fifty:

> Year in, year out, most of us do our best
> To make a hundred, perfect on the test.
> The problems get harder, the teachers
>   don't grade fair,
> But hell, the bell ain't rung and you're
>   halfway there.

There's a room given over to exercise equipment—a weight machine, a stair-climbing machine, a dual-motion cycle machine, a rowing machine, a NordicTrack, an "abs-workout station"—but Williams seems not to use it. It's both new and noticeably untouched. So much kit, however, betrays a certain unease. The unease is evident in Williams's hair. It's streaked. It was dark brown (almost black) when I first met her, before she performed on "Saturday Night Live" last year. I've also seen it blond. When I eventually leave Nashville, and am reminded that I've forgone Williams's invitation to stay at her house ("You'd have been the first journalist to see me without makeup"), I suddenly appreciate how much time she puts into her looks. This is "the appearance thing," having to come across as attractive and sexy, to be, as she puts it, "someone you look at and say, 'Whoa, what a babe! I wouldn't mind . . .' " It is a preoccupation of a forty-seven-year-old only now breaking into a business that, committed to discovering the next Christina Aguilera, considers twenty-seven to be getting on. "I know I shouldn't be so bothered about this stuff," Williams says. "Politically, I know I shouldn't—what do I want to be, every guy's sex fantasy? But when you're in it, as I am, it's hard to ignore."

For all that, Williams's politics seem a bit sixties-ish ragbaggy. A characteristic Williams statement was her reply to a question put to her by *Rolling Stone* last December about her hopes for the next millennium: Lucinda, expressing a loathing for the boom economy, called for a stock-market crash and longed for a Depression, a peculiar dream for a woman who only now—that is, in the past eighteen months, say—has money in a bank account. In 1998, when the filmmaker Paul Schrader agreed to make a video for Lucinda's last album and flew down to Nashville to discuss possible ideas, he was struck by how badly this woman needed a break: here was someone in her mid-forties who was having trouble meeting the essential needs of food and shelter. (In the event, no video was made; no video has ever been made—another Williams tenet, MTV culture is a bad thing, although it's unclear if this arises out of a loathing for television or a paralyzing anxiety about appearing on it.) And last year, when I joined Lucinda in New Orleans, it was evident that the money troubles weren't quite over. We spent an afternoon shopping for old music posters—Fats Domino, for her brother, and Clifton Chenier, "King of Zydeco," for her friend Margaret Moser, a Louisiana-born music journalist—only to have Williams's credit card rejected.

In many of these things—the ethic of dissent, the anti-establishment stance, the ease of doing without—her father's influence is unmistakable. Miller Williams, a man of indefatigable productivity, has twenty-nine books to his name, including twelve volumes of poetry. Lucinda has memories of his writing a poem every night after dinner, and he appears in the family photo albums very much playing the part, with an untrimmed beard and a black beret, flopped over a chair, writing verse on a yellow legal pad. Does a poet father make for a poetic, songwriting daughter? The answer must be yes, but it's not so obvious. Miller Williams sometimes performs with his daughter—he reads a poem, she sings, then he reads another poem—but you would be hard-pressed to hear a genetic link in their diction. And while Lucinda submits the text of her songs to him before she records them—there will be nothing for years, and suddenly the songs start arriving in the mail—his editorial interventions seem to be modest at most: she cites his objection, for instance, to the phrase "faded blue dress" in the song "He Never Got Enough Love." (She changed it to "sad blue dress.") You get the sense that what she wants is not Dad's advice but his approval, almost like a report card. Lucinda's friend Margaret Moser finds the whole thing peculiar—"this Daddy-girl thing," she calls it, this need to be patted on the back by a man who has nothing to do with the kind of rough-hewn, laconic cigarette ads for masculinity whom Lucinda has been consistently attracted to, although the disjunction that Moser describes is revealing in itself (and might well explain why so many of the Marlboro Men don't work out).

In any case, the idea of Daddy as a benign patriarchal pedagogue isn't a new thing; for much of Lucinda's life, that was his role. In 1969, when Lucinda was in the tenth grade, she was suspended from high school more than once—the first time for refusing to pledge allegiance to the flag—and her father eventually assumed the responsibility of completing her education. (He had already assumed the responsibility of her upbringing, having got custody of her and her two siblings after he divorced Lucinda's mother.) His solution to her education was to give her a reading list of a hundred great books, from the Iliad to "One Hundred Years of Solitude."

When I met Miller Williams, on a visit to Fayetteville, Arkansas, where he teaches at the university, I was interested in his account of Lucinda's suspension, an episode that must have been distressing in the extreme. I was wrong. Dad had been delighted—"just tickled pink!"—and he pointed out how the showdown involving Lucinda's refusal to pledge allegiance was similar to one of his own, twenty years before, when he was fired from McNeese State University for refusing to take the Louisiana loyalty oath required of state employees. But the parallels didn't stop there. Just after Lucinda was kicked out for being a dissident, he quit his job at Loyola University in an act of protest. The university, unhappy about a piece he had published as the editor of a new college literary magazine (a review of Anne Sexton's "Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator," which included too many graphic quotes), had insisted that it approve the contents of future issues before they were printed. This was censorship and not something Miller Williams could tolerate. An out-of-work father, an out-of-school daughter—what a peculiar family it must have been, I found myself thinking, but Miller, also the child of a dissident (a socialist Methodist minister so committed to challenging the status quo that he eventually questioned the Resurrection, discovered that he could no longer conduct the Easter service, and quit), wanted me to understand that this was the Williams way. On the drive from the airport, he bubbled over with more happy showdowns involving his daughter, including her recent confrontation with the producers of "Good Morning America" after they asked her to cut a verse from the song she was about to sing, "Right in Time," her paean to autoeroticism. The lines, Williams added, were not cut, and you could see him making a connection—her song about masturbation, his review about masturbation; like father, like daughter—and he chuckled merrily.

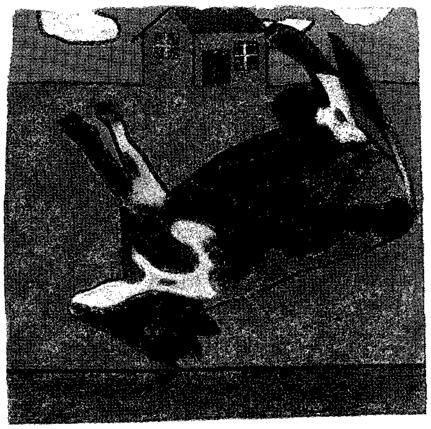
Lucinda never got a high-school diploma; for that matter, she never learned to read music, and although she later passed a college-entrance examination and was admitted to the University of Arkansas, she was bored by the rigors of formal education and was at a loss in harmony class. After one semester, she took her guitar and left Fayetteville, heading first for New Orleans, then for Austin, before settling in Houston—the folk scene of the early seventies.

When she returned, in 1977, four years later, it was under a doctor's orders. She had been singing so punishingly, in smoky clubs, on street corners, busking for rent, straining the rough, husky, untrained, almost Janis Joplin-like voice that characterized her early singing—a sound so sandpapery that Emmylou Harris described it as capable of peeling the chrome off a trailer hitch—that she was in danger of losing it altogether. Nodules had formed on her vocal cords. She was twenty-four. She had a notebook of songs, but no demos, no deals. And that was when she met Frank Stanford, the first of the men who would end up informing so much of the music she'd write for the next two decades.

BEAUTIFUL AS THE SUN

Stanford, whose story still deserves a book (or a movie), was a precocious, original, highly accomplished poet, a huge personality, with an engine of charm and devastating good looks. "He

TAKES



RICHARD MERKIN

When I am in the neighborhood of Columbus Circle with time to kill, I sometimes go to the basement of an old brownstone tenement on Fifty-ninth Street, just off Ninth Avenue, and sit down on a rat-gnawed Egyptian mummy and cut up touches with Charles Eugene Cassell, a man for whom I have a lot of respect. Mr. Cassell is a haughty old Negro who calls himself Captain Charley because he had charge of an ammunition barge for a brief period during the World War and felt that he deserved the title. About a decade ago, when he got too old for work, he took some of his savings and opened an establishment in a Harlem basement, which he called Captain Charley's Private Museum for Intelligent People; some time later, after a series of robberies, he moved his museum to the basement on Fifty-ninth Street. The Captain is a relentless collector, and stored in the place are thousands of curious odds and ends he gathered during the fifty-five years he worked as a sailor or cook on navy and merchant ships, and during other years when he was a servant in clubs and hotels in Manhattan. The most valuable exhibit in the museum is a collection of stuffed animals. A lot of them are moth-eaten, but several times a year the Captain rents them to moving-picture theatres for lobby displays during the showing of jungle films. Most of the revenue from the museum comes from the rental of the stuffed, mangy beasts; the Captain charges fifteen cents admission, but half the time he forgets to collect it. The majority of the visitors to the museum are passers-by attracted by the big cardboard signs the Captain sticks up outside on the street—signs such as "If You Consider Yourself Intelligent, Step Inside" and "Captain Charley Will Sell a Few Odds and Ends from Ten Cents to a Hundred Dollars." Some of the visitors are women hunting for bargains in antiques.

I like to sit in the cool, smelly basement and listen to the Captain. After I have listened to him for fifteen minutes or so, I get to thinking about something that happened to me when I was ten years old. My father and a hired man named Alonzo were butchering a cow in the barn back of our home in North Carolina, and I was helping. We were hoisting the cow up in the air with a block and tackle so we could skin her, and Alonzo and I had hold of the rope. We had the cow off the ground when something went wrong with the block and tackle, and when I came to I was out in the barnyard running around in circles and screeching, and my head was bloody. When I was caught and subdued by Alonzo and stretched out on the green grass under a pecan tree, I looked up at my father and said, "What happened, Daddy?" My father had a faraway look in his eyes and he said, "Son, you were hit on the head with a cow." For at least three days after I received the blow on the head everything people said to me seemed illogical or disconnected; every conversation I heard seemed to end unerringly in confusion. That is the way I feel after I have listened to Captain Charley for an hour or so. I feel as if I had been hit on the head with a cow.

—*Joseph Mitchell*
A Reporter at Large, August 27, 1938

Victoria Roberts

"Good news, honey—seventy is the new fifty."

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was like Charlton Heston when he was a young man," Miller Williams tells me, recalling that, years before, Stanford had been admitted to a graduate writing workshop at the University of Arkansas while he was still a teen-age undergraduate, an unprecedented thing.

"He was as beautiful as the sun," the poet Carolyn (C. D.) Wright recalls when we meet to talk about Stanford. She ran a small press with him, the Lost Roads Publishers, and they were lovers, although Stanford was married to a painter, Ginny Stanford. "He had girlie curly hair and hazel eyes and big white teeth and a wide jaw and a wide mouth, which women loved. And men did, too. Everyone loved Frank. They couldn't help it." The writer Ellen Gilchrist knew him, she tells me, when I reach her in Mississippi, "very, very, very, very well," and representations of him are scattered throughout her short stories. "To know Frank then," she says, "was to see how Jesus got his followers. Everybody worshipped him."

Stanford was a Mississippi-born illegitimate child, abandoned at the Emory Home for Unwed Mothers, near Hattiesburg, a "convenience" run by one Sister White for politicians and businessmen. He was adopted by Dorothy Gilbert, who subsequently married Albert Franklin Stanford, an older man, a gentlemanly, worldly embodiment of the Old South. Albert Franklin Stanford built the levees along tributaries of the Mississippi, and this was where the boy passed his summers, alongside his much older "father," spending nights in tents on the levee, sitting in on the campfires the black laborers made, listening to their stories. The experience had a practical consequence. Stanford was working as a surveyor when Lucinda met him, in the spring of 1978, a quiet, enchanting figure who avoided cities and cultivated a manner of strangeness, appearing suddenly, unannounced, from out of the woods, smelling of earth, in suspenders and leather work boots. The experience also informed his poetry, and by then he had published nine volumes, and had just completed the four-hundred-and-fifty-page narrative poem "The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You," a surreal account of a clairvoyant eleven-year-old's crusade for racial justice, with cameo appearances by movie stars and boxers ("I saw Sonny Liston crying in a short-order café"). Stanford's poems are distinguished by their easy, appealing voice—an intimate, companionable, please-stay-and-have-another-drink kind of voice—and a language that is local and highly vernacular, and that often features the speech of Mississippi blacks. "He evoked the Delta in his poems," Ellen Gilchrist recalls. "His poems *were* the Delta." There are images of women by campfires, of peas being shelled, of fingers smelling of backwater, of escaped convicts and people called Ray Baby and Born-in-the-Camp-with-Six-Toes. And there is Stanford's own half love affair with easeful Death, who appears in various guises—as a cool hipster in shiny loafers and a Cadillac, as a man in a bow tie running a hotel. Stanford was irresistible to the young singer, and she fell heavily in love.

Or so Lucinda concedes, more than twenty years after the event, embarrassed, awkward, in the company of her boyfriend, Richard Price, who has been, on every occasion I've seen them together, a paradigm of understanding, but who is unnerved by the Stanford story. "I just can't believe you fell for it," he says, the "it" being the easy charm, the good looks, the dark Byronic act. "I mean, you're so smart. How could you be so stupid?"

"It was just a fling," C. D. Wright tells me of Lucinda's relationship with Stanford. "And," she adds, sounding a little testy, "only because I was out of town at the time." But Stanford was having a lot of flings—more, it seems, than will ever be known, a frenzy of philandering. He was living with C. D. Wright while promising his wife that they'd get back together. ("He'd stop by every week," Ginny Stanford recalls in a piece published in the *New Orleans Review*, "to tell another lie.") And, by Wright's own count, he was making the same promise to six other women (a writer, a potter, a poet, a sculptor)—actually, maybe there were seven, if you include "that intense thing he was having in New Orleans." Well, who knows how many? "In that last month," Ginny Stanford recalls, "he was seeing lots of people." Frank Stanford, Wright says, was one of the greatest liars she has ever known.

He had spent two weeks in Louisiana. This was in June. On the day he returned to Fayetteville, he sent flowers to Lucinda, who was out, and her father accepted them. Stanford went home and discovered there was a problem: for ten days, the woman he was living with and the wife he said he was returning to had been together, dismantling his lies. “There was a scene,” C. D. Wright recalls, “and I’m not sure Frank had been rejected before. Suddenly, he wanted to go to his office. I didn’t know why. We were all upset.” The two women accompanied him and waited in the car. They learned later that he’d gone to pick up a pistol. They drove home. Then he went into the bedroom and shot himself three times. “That deadly duet,” his wife recalls, of the gun and the moan: “Pop. *Oh!* Pop. *Oh!* Pop. *Oh!* ”

Miller Williams got a call, asking him to help. “There was blood all over the bed and on the telephone,” he says. “When you’ve had that much to do with someone’s career, and someone so promising, and then to be asked to clean up after him—well, it was pretty tough.” When he returned, exhausted, unspeakably sad, he found Lucinda waiting—she’d put the flowers in a vase. She hadn’t heard the news.

At the funeral, she and her father stood back, out of the way. “And then after everyone had left,” Miller Williams recalls, “and the coffin was lowered, and we were all by ourselves, we walked up to the grave, and Lucinda picked up a handful of dirt and sprinkled it across the coffin.” (The act echoes a line in one of Stanford’s last poems.) “And I remember thinking, Oh, Lucinda, God bless her, and I felt she was just going to disappear from the pain of it all. And, as we walked off, we turned, and there was a girl of about eighteen, very pretty, who had stood even further back—we hadn’t seen her. And she then walked up and picked up a handful of dirt and threw it over the grave.”

Lucinda Williams wrote several songs about Stanford’s death. “Pineola,” an example of what her friend Hobart Taylor calls her documentary songs, is a heartfelt, angry rendition of the thing, more or less as it happened. There isn’t much that was changed—Pineola for Fayetteville, Sonny for Frank, and a Pentecostal burial instead of a Catholic one. The song describes how Lucinda got the news (“When Daddy told me what happened”); her own flattened response (“I could not speak a single word. No tears streamed down my face. I just sat there on the living-room couch, staring off into space”); and the funeral, where Stanford’s mother stood baffled by the hundreds of strangers who had shown up to mourn her adopted child’s death. The song ends with a refrain about the handful of earth thrown onto the casket. Like several other Lucinda tunes of this time, “Pineola” is in what might be called a country style, reminiscent, say, of Bobbie Gentry’s old AM radio favorite “Ode to Billie Joe.” It’s the song that hooked the novelist Annie Proulx, who heard it for the first time on the CD compilation accompanying the *Oxford American* Southern-music issue, and who described it as “the best alternative country song I’d heard in years.”

“Sweet Old World” is a different kind of song—more ballad than short story—and its qualities are at the heart of the difficulty involved in articulating the value of any piece of music, which exists first as something in time, as sound and not as text. The difficulty is compounded with lyrical-seeming songs, if only because one part of their achievement is in language, a language that, once separated from the melody, can look banal. “Sweet Old World,” written in the second person, is addressed to a suicide. Musically, it is characteristic of Williams’s later songs. The more obvious, “pretty” harmonic elements are in the background (those sad, mournful Gurf Morlix licks, echoing the melody, played on guitar and violin), which allows Williams’s voice to stand out up front, full of rough feelings and an abrasive sadness. The lyrics are a list of what the dead man is missing (“See what you lost when you left this world”), and consist of simple images arising out of the things we feel, see, smell: dancing with no shoes, the sensation of being touched by another’s fingertips, the sound of your name called by a beloved, a train at night, the feeling of slipping a ring on your finger, the tingling of being kissed, the act of breath-

“But the weather looks great for the rest of the week.”

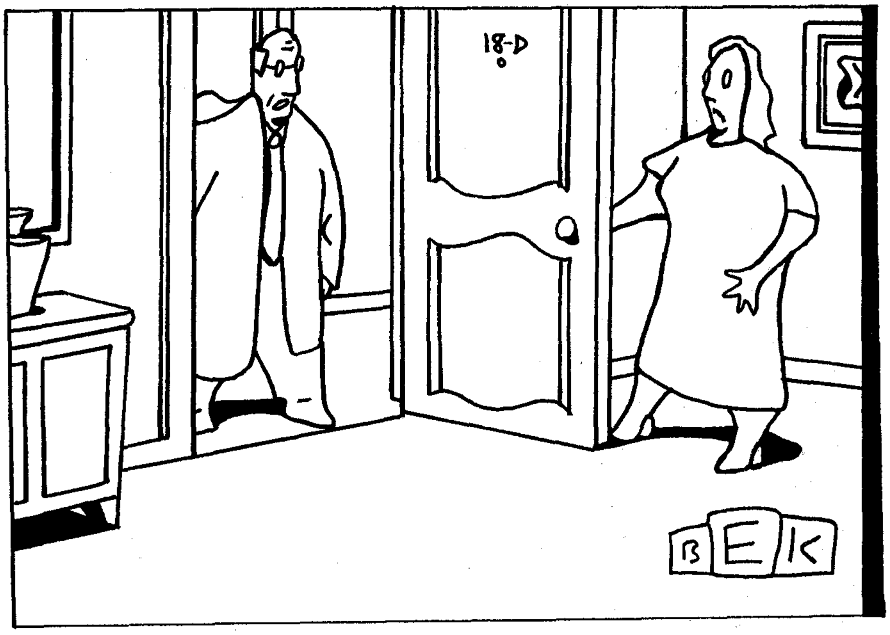
ing. But because the song's images are of the senses it has an intimacy, even a seductive eroticism. This is perfectly understandable, given that it's being sung to a former lover, but was not something I appreciated until I saw it performed at an outdoor evening concert in Oxford, Mississippi, last year, when the air was swollen from a day of heavy thunderstorms. As a result, the music was rounder-sounding, cushioned, and the notes seemed to linger. There was a crowd of about five thousand crushed into the square. They weren't restless, exactly, but, having spent a day inside, amid reports that the concert might be cancelled, they had a pent-up attentiveness. The stars were coming out, but there was no breeze, just this heavy stillness, and then this tune, with its hip-rolling beat, which was about a suicide, after all. Slowly, people began dancing, everyone swaying, and hands were holding hips, and hands were slipping down trousers, and boys were kissing girls, and girls were kissing girls, slow, wet, slow-dance kisses, and, over to my left, just above Square Books, a couple were undoing their jeans, and, over on another balcony, just above the bar Proud Larry's, two women were holding each other so melodically that their embrace was virtually a sexual act. (“The shit we see people doing when we are onstage,” Richard Price tells me later.) That night was the second night with the band for Greg Atticus Finch, a keyboard player who has since been dropped; he still remembers the tune that evening. “ ‘Sweet Old World,’ ” he said—in a burst of generosity remarkable for a person who has been banished from a band—“that song is simply the best ballad ever written. No one could write a better ballad than it. No one has written a better ballad. It just doesn't get any better.”

“My broker says don't panic, I'm still young enough to recoup my losses.”

Williams began writing both “Sweet Old World” and “Pineola” in 1979, the year after Stanford died. She had to wait thirteen years before they were released.

Why so long? “Because,” Williams says, “my career has been distinguished by other people, who have always been men, telling me what I should sound like.” (To be fair, her first album consisted of all those blues numbers, and none of her own compositions, because that's what *she* thought the male producer wanted.) “Happy Woman Blues,” her next album, was produced in 1980, and features “Sharp Cutting Wings,” a mournful love tune (inspired by yet another poet) that has a characteristic Williams line: a series of love fantasies—of flying off with her poet lover, of being with him in a foreign country, of wanting no one to know them—that ends abruptly with her need for a small loan of “about a hundred dollars” (and there's something very exacting about that “about,” as though it's just enough to pay last month's phone bill, score a Diet Coke and a turkey sandwich, and buy a Greyhound bus ticket). On the last day in the studio, the producer took it upon himself to introduce drums to Williams's string-band mix—not a bad sound, she felt, but it wasn't what she would have done, and wasn't something she was asked about. It was immaterial; the album made so little money that it's legitimate to ask if it was ever sold.

But no record made her any money, despite the fanatical efforts of so many people, including Hobart Taylor, who came upon Lucinda's playing at Anderson Fair or the Full Moon Café, and then embarked on a mission to make her known to the rest of the world. Taylor, a Houston journalist before he abandoned his career to promote Lucinda, helped her with the rent, paid for meals, and spent a modest inheritance on putting Lucinda up in the Chelsea Hotel in New York and producing a demo of ten songs, “Pineola” among them. Taylor failed to get a record company to take it. So, too, did David Hirshland, another dreamy disciple, who, like Taylor, abandoned his career (as a booking agent) so that he could throw himself into the cause. The result was another demo, this one paid for by CBS, whose executives then dithered, before confessing that they didn't know what it was and had no idea how to sell it: it was too much like country, according to the rock-and-roll executives; too much like rock and roll, according to the country executives. Williams, meanwhile, was working at a B. Dalton bookstore in a shopping mall near Glendale, driving a beat-up Saab that had a party trick of breaking down on the Harbor Freeway. When, four years later, she was finally taken up by a major record label, RCA, which was then run by Bob Buziak (who understood that Williams's music was neither one thing nor another and needed to be left alone), Buziak got fired, putting her into the hands of a producer who secretly believed she was a disco babe, a secret he didn't share with Williams herself until he had taken her already recorded songs and remixed them, adding a big bass here, a heavy drumbeat there, which, again, was not necessarily a bad sound, but it wasn't hers, and, this time, wasn't something she was going to put up with. She walked out on the deal, even though she was broke. She turned forty and was still broke when Mary Chapin Carpenter covered one of her tunes, "Passionate Kisses," and made it into a Grammy-winning hit. In many ways, it's the Lucinda Williams theme song, asking that essential question: I've waited so long, why can't I have everything now, dammit! Why can't I have a comfortable bed that won't hurt my back, and food for when I'm hungry, and clothes for when I'm cold, plus some pens that don't run out of ink (a poet's daughter, after all), and some quiet thinking time, and a big house full of friends, and a rock band, and a regular supply of passionate kisses?



"I'm your most boring nightmare."

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WEEPING FITS

I've been studying Lucinda Williams's face—a youthful face, soft skin, few wrinkles, a face so much younger-looking than her age that waspish peers whisper that she must have submitted it to the surgeon's nip and tuck. (She hasn't.) Its dominant quality is its changeableness. This is a face full of weather—or, maybe, more accurately, it's akin to a weather report, a forecast of the personality you're going to see next. Now, the two of us in her living room, in the evening (Williams is an early-afternoon riser), her face is relaxed and expressive, and yields easily to a teasing, cackling laugh—a laugh that makes you feel appreciated and enjoyed. In concert, she has another face, and one that rarely gives up so much as a smile. It firms up, reveals little, and is at odds with the expressive songs she sings. It's a matter of control. Upheaval makes for these songs, and upheaval goes into the writing of them; she often works herself into such a state, reliving some awfulness, that she'll end up in a dark depression (Williams's depressions are legendary; "Am I too blue for you?" is the refrain of one song devoted to them; "When I cry like the sky like the sky sometimes, am I too blue?"), and these moments can be marked by weeping fits that go on for days. Williams now believes that the songs she writes when she has reached this therapeutic, unprotected rawness are her best, and that she has to go through this kind of trauma in order to write. But then these songs, once made, are performed with a fanatical sense of self-government; and that's what her face conveys then: discipline, containment, control.

She cried for days while writing the ballad "Little Angel, Little Brother," about her younger brother, an exceptional talent on the keyboard ("I see you now at the piano, your back a slow curve, playin' Ray Charles and Fats Domino while I sang all the words"), who has never realized his promise, owing to unhappiness or drink or that old Louisiana gift for self-destruction: "I see you sleeping in the car, curled up on the back seat, parked outside of a bar, an empty bottle at your feet, Little Angel, Little Brother." The song evokes some of the anguish of Lucinda's upbringing, among family members who were distinguished by their artistic ambitions but were held back or frustrated in some profound, soul-destroying way. Her brother also had the makings of a poet. (At fourteen, he'd voraciously read and reread all of Shakespeare.) Then, more disturbing, there was her mother, Lucy, who still had dreams of being a concert pianist when she met Miller Williams, but abandoned them after she quickly had three children, and struggled to bring them up, until, owing to mental illness or depression or something the family is uncomfortable talking about, she yielded her place to a nineteen-year-old undergraduate/housekeeper/caretaker/savior, whom her husband brought in to look after his confused offspring and whom he would eventually marry. (In a domestic ceasefire, the two women lived in the same house for five years.) And there was Miller Williams himself, who, for all his robust confidence, had spent years in an intellectual wilderness. By training and education, he was a biologist, but he had no aptitude for the sciences and kept moving from job to job, unable to secure tenure, until he abandoned both the university and his family and went to New York to work as a junior editor, sending home paltry sums set aside from his paltry salary.

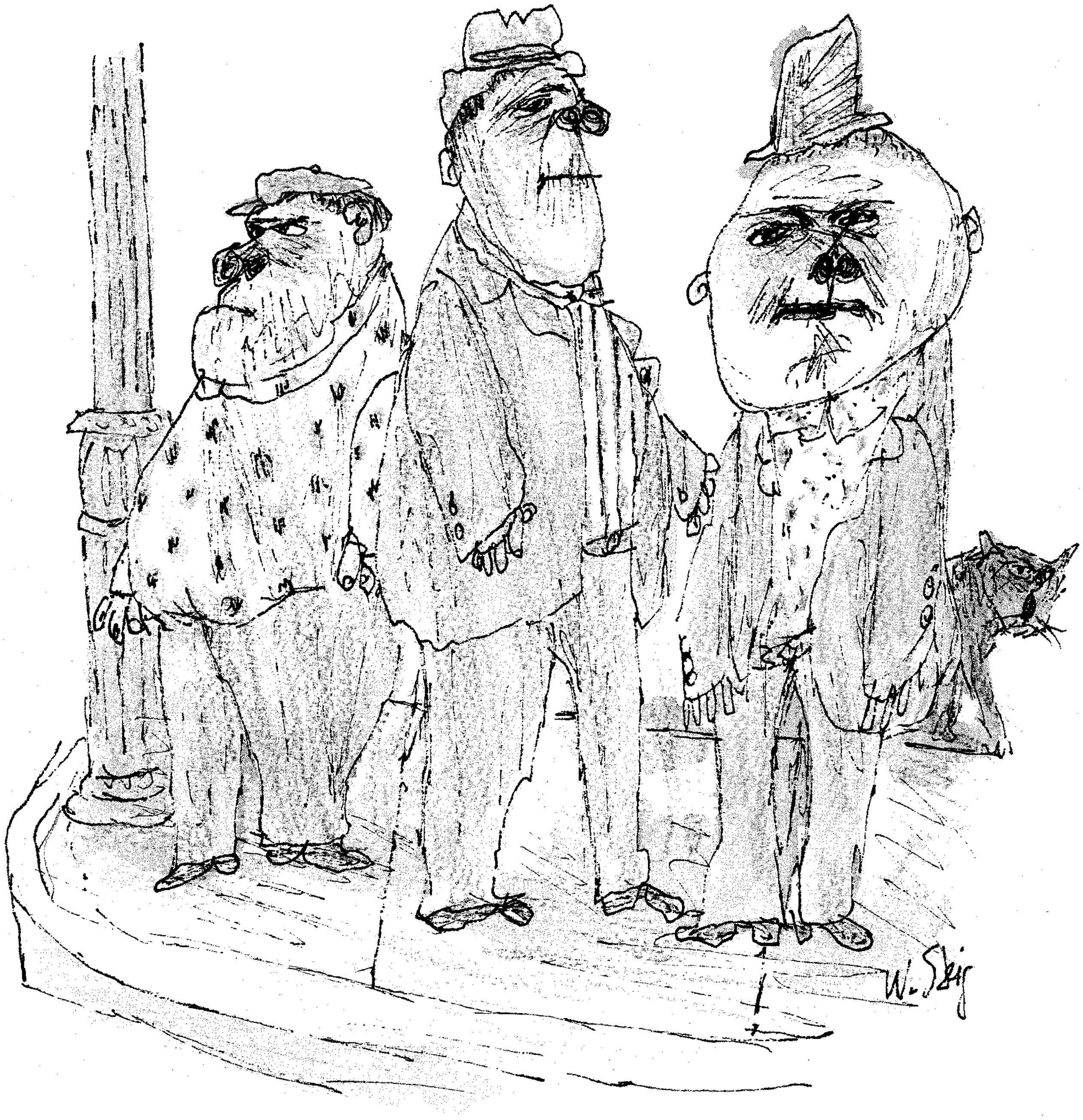
Backstage, at the end of a concert last year at the House of Blues in New Orleans, I witnessed a Louisiana family reunion, which included Lucinda's mother, who had just moved back to the Crescent City ("Come see me," she told me, in a whisper. "I'm so lonely"); her brother Robert, who was also now living in New Orleans, driving a long-distance truck (and who was apprehensive about speaking to a journalist—his having been made the drunken self-destructive subject of "Little Angel, Little Brother" was plenty of attention, thank you very much); plus the much-loved Uncle Cecil, from Sulphur, Louisiana. As a child, Lucinda had seen so much of Uncle Cecil that she asked her mother if they'd lived in Sulphur, too, along with Lake Charles and Macon and a half-dozen other small college towns in the South. "No, no," her mother said, tellingly. "You're thinking of Iowa"—another town in Louisiana—"your grandmother's, where we went so often because we had no money for food and used to go there to eat." Lucinda's childhood was one of testing difficulty, and it is, she admits, an element in why she writes her particular songs of loss and neediness, some of which is touched on in "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road," her account of being a five-year-old in the South, with lyrics that evoke a time of tense domestic hush-hushness: of neighbors watching ("Pull the curtains back and look outside. Somebody somewhere don't know"); of parents' squabbling ("There goes the screen door slamming shut. You better do what you're told. When I get back the room better be picked up"); of a family's having a secret that others don't know ("Low hum of voices in the front seat. Stories nobody knows. Got folks in Jackson we're going to meet. Car wheels on a gravel road"). When Lucinda's father first heard the song, he sought out his daughter and apologized.

At one point, backstage, I felt I was seeing a comparably real-life illustration of the Williams first-person principle—the notion that her more serious fans engage with her music on a deeper, weirder level than they might with other songwriters' songs, because Lucinda's are believed to be so autobiographical. I'd seen the principle expressed in her fan mail, which I'd spent an evening reading in her company ("Miss Williams, did you ever get your heart stomped on by a guy named Alex? I figure you must have—or by an evil twin of his—since about every damn song in your incredible new album nails me straight in the heart"), and which featured confessions of exceptional pain that was either relieved, or relived, by a Williams song. (As the night wore on, and Lucinda kept failing to find a specific letter, one written by a d.j. who was committed to playing something by her every night, because "Sweet Old World" had stopped him from killing himself, you could see her face grow progressively darker—Weather alert!—as she skimmed confession after heartfelt confession, knowing that she got this kind of mail because of the kind of song she wrote, and she wrote that kind of song because she went through Hell living a hurt or humiliation, and then went through Hell reliving it when she wrote about it, and she hadn't written a thing now in three years, and she was dreading what she was going to have to go through again—Hell was beckoning.) There at the House of Blues, a fan, the cheerfully named Trish Blossom, had slipped past the tight security, with a husband in tow, and had fixed on Lucinda. Trish Blossom was blond and tall and pretty, and came from the backwoods somewhere in Louisiana—she told this to me, adding that she didn't leave the woods ever, not for nobody, and she had come to New Orleans to see Lucinda, and here she was, and did Lucinda know that Trish Blossom never comes out for nobody, which all seemed a little nutty, but not threatening, I thought, until I glanced over at the husband and saw a face that had an unmistakable look of panic. ("Do you realize," he whispered, "how serious this is?") "She just needs love," Trish Blossom was saying, in a kind of trance. "Can't you see that she needs love? Nobody has loved her, and she has so much love to give, and I have so much love, and I will give her the love she needs." She eventually reached Williams, who handled the encounter expertly—this was a regular exchange. (The most recent involved a man who rushed the stage with a dozen roses, screaming "I love you, Lucinda!" before he was tackled and carried off, shouting, "I am not John Hinckley!") Lucinda gave Trish a hug, which became an embrace, but she came back for more ("I just can't let go") until Lucinda let herself be kissed on the lips, and reassured Trish that, yes, she was right, she just needed some love, and she was pleased that Trish had some to give her.

I'm not sure why first-person narratives—in songs, like Williams's, or even in fiction—invade the sentimental nervous system so effectively, but they provided me with a strategy for understanding Lucinda's music. It yields insights into a number of songs—the ones involving Frank Stanford, say, or something like "Drunken Angel," which was inspired by the death of Blaze Foley ("Blood spilled out from the hole in your heart, over the strings of your guitar, the worn-down places in the wood, that once made you feel so good"), a fellow Austin musician. (Foley was a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound subversive, antic, ferociously anti-commercial poet of folk rock—he celebrated the self-righteousness of his poverty by decorating his jeans, jacket, cowboy hat, and guitar with the same duct tape that held his boots together—who threatened a youth for stealing his own father's welfare checks until the boy shot Foley in the ribs, an act so enragingly pusillanimous that Foley chased the youth and eventually bled to death. You can see why Blaze Foley would appeal to Lucinda's accept-no-compromises world view. But it makes you wonder: Doesn't she know anyone besides bass players and dead men?)

The strategy is even more interesting in relation to Clyde Woodward, probably the most important love interest in Lucinda's life. Clyde, another bass player, who *almost* came from Louisiana, seems to have informed a dozen songs. But this is where the auto-

NEIGHBOR HOODS BY WILLIAM STEIG



"It's getting late, sweetheart. We should probably think about heading back to the Arctic Circle."

biographical approach gets complicated.

I'm sitting in Lucinda's house in Nashville, going through three meticulously organized volumes of photographs. Clyde appears regularly, a big fleshy man with a flap of dark hair and round cheeks and a barrel chest. Lucinda points out Clyde's characteristic pose—arms thrown out wide, a come-join-the-party look. There are pictures of the two of them in Austin. "That," Lucinda says, "is when Clyde persuaded me to pawn a rare twelve-string guitar so we could get food and beer" (whereupon the pawnshop burned down, a typical Clyde touch of fortune). There are pictures of them in New York; Clyde had come along ostensibly to be her manager, although he was jealous of her talent and was always getting in the way. (Clyde, in Lucinda's descriptions, comes across as a passionate, possessive, pig-headed, pugnacious sensualist—jealous and head-butting, but high entertainment.) There is another of Clyde helping her father build a porch in Fayetteville. "That was when we really had no money and nothing left to pawn." And another of Clyde in a kitchen, making gumbo, throwing a party, knocking back a beer, and suddenly Lucinda cries out, "Oh, my God! Oh, my God! Clyde is dead. And Frank is dead. What a thing. All my old boyfriends were in love with the idea of Louisiana, and they're dead!"

Like Stanford, Clyde was fascinated by death, but for Clyde death was an opponent in an elaborate game of combat, the only thing getting in the way of his kamikaze, nothing-can-stop-us approach to life. But Lucinda wasn't interested in dying; she had a career in mind, and so they broke up after four years. And then Clyde did die, more or less just like that, forty years old, jaundiced, anemic, skeletal beyond recognition, in a hospital in East Texas, trying to get back to Louisiana before his liver packed in—from excesses of all kinds. Clyde's last hours were spent with Lucinda's friend Margaret Moser (Lucinda was on a plane trying to reach him), as Moser read to him from a journal about Louisiana, which she had started compiling when she was living far away and feeling homesick. The journal had been Clyde's idea. Moser is from Louisiana. Clyde wasn't, although he was obsessed with the place and used to preach where to find its values: not in its open-air rock concerts, for instance, which you'd find anywhere, but in its parish dances, which you find nowhere else. Or in the dance halls along the road between Eunice and Opelousas. ("Inside, you'd be the only whites, and it would be packed shoulder to butt.") Or in its out-of-the-way crawfish farms, and its cockfights, and its gnarly French Catholicism. Or in odd things, like zydeco, which Clyde played. Or in its gumbo—for Clyde as much a metaphor as a food ("He saw God in a bowl of gumbo"): the spicy Delta hot pot that said, with its cayenne and its crawfish and its other crustaceans, this place and no other.

When Lucinda was growing up, Louisiana meant "backward." It was "country," and people made fun of her father's accent (even though, technically, his was not Louisiana but northeastern Arkansas), and he sometimes tried to disguise it. (My Louisiana father buried his accent deep, and told me once that much of his life was lived to prove that he could be more than a "hick" from a north-woods Louisiana paper-mill town, and I was struck by how the word "hick," very much his word, like "boondocks" and "sticks," was already dated and without force.) Clyde appeared in Lucinda's life when the perception of the place was shifting—in the way of these things, its hick, redneck ways are now the half-rebel expression of an inexplicably charismatic, bad-boy code of excess—and he helped her to recognize the shift. And she repaid him by writing a song about Lake Charles, her birthplace and his fantasy home, and where his ashes are now scattered. The song is the only one in her repertoire that affects her in unpredictable ways, and when she performs it she sometimes breaks down.

GOOD LIARS

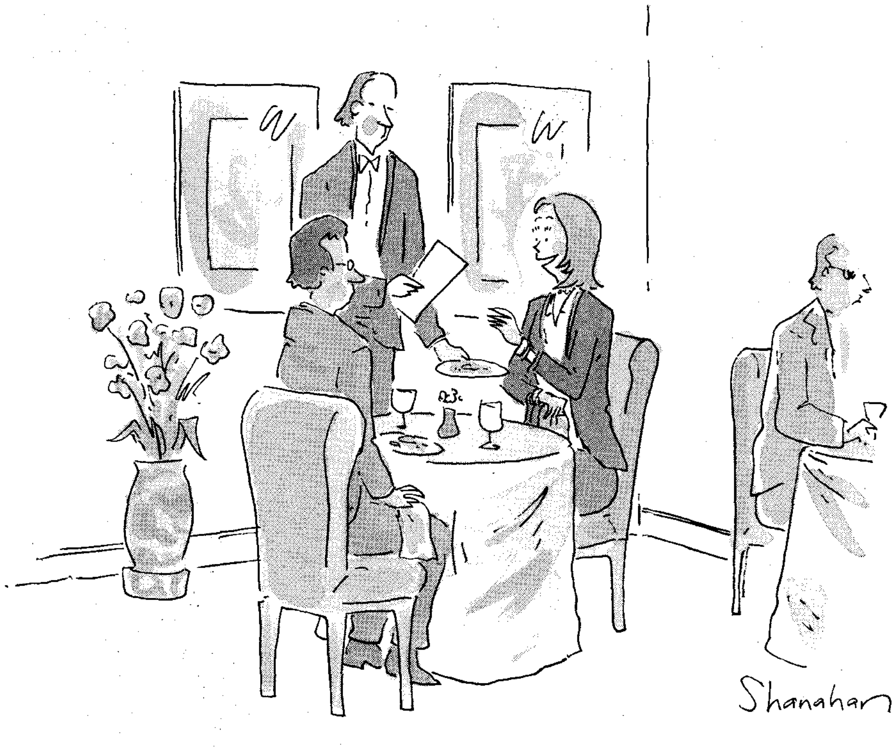
The South has a history of mythmakers, and at the heart of the Southern myth is a love affair with loss. It's what underlies the myth of the good Southern family; or the notion of the Southern gentleman, of honor and Old World grace and hospitality; or the filthy romance of the Confederate flag; or the sugary fables of "Gone with the Wind." These myths—still current, even if anachronistic, even if (like débutante balls and the languid luxury of a south-Georgia accent) *always* anachronistic—

are among those cited by Edmund Wilson in "Patriotic Gore," in the pages of this magazine forty years ago, and offered up as examples of how the South is seen to have retained something that modernizing America no longer has. These were also illustrations of the way people from the North liked to think about the South then, units in the elaborate calculation to compensate for a place that was, when Wilson was writing, still synonymous with defeat and self-righteous pride and a kind of nationalized nationalistic bad judgment. In forty years, the South has changed, but mythmaking remains a habit of mind. I'm not sure that the myths Southerners fashion today are even necessarily that different—less obvious, sometimes subtle to the point of obscurity, but fundamentally founded on the principle that the South has got something that the rest of America doesn't have anymore. Some of this is in Lucinda Williams's songs ("I'm going back to the Crescent City, where everything's still the same"), although the myths she makes are more sophisticated and of her own private order—it's a vision in which Jack Kerouac meets Robert Johnson and General Robert E. Lee, and they form a blues band, singing lyrics dashed off by Eudora Welty, and after a blow-out, never-to-be-repeated concert they disappear at dawn on their Harleys, where they all die, driving far too fast, in a terrible accident. Like her Southern accent and her sense of "country," it's a vision built on her possession of uniqueness. And it was, I now realize, what drew me to the Delta on my own, and to Rosedale, looking for a juke joint that may no longer exist, and then, afterward, heading down Mississippi State Highway No. 1, the river always on my right, the railroad tracks running parallel somewhere on my left, and the sky big and endless, and nothing else in view, except, every few miles, a white church, an adornment on the flood-flattened Delta horizon, surrounded by cars, having mysteriously drawn a crowd from a land that seemed to have no one on it.

What was I looking for? Something else, something personal, some remembered connection to a place, now lost, farther down the Delta, in Louisiana, in an oppressive, sulfur-stinking Civil War paper-mill town that, when I got there, later that day, would be proudly flying the Confederate flag on the birthday of M.L.K. It was where my family came from, and not all that far from where I was born, and in this I recognize now that, like Trish Blossom and the obsessive letter-writing fans, and like Lucinda's father, I'd personalized this woman's music—I had been tempted by its complex first-person, identify-with-me inducements—because in fact the songs that arise out of this landscape are not necessarily autobiographical at all; they merely seem to be so; they invite us to think them so. Good mythmakers are good liars. When Miller Williams sought out his daughter backstage, after listening to "Car Wheels on a Gravel Road," and apologized for her upbringing, he surprised Lucinda. ("Why, Daddy—that song's not about you!") And while "2 Kool 2 Be 4-Gotten," her tribute to the Magic City juke joint in Rosedale, is a recitation of juke-joint images, it is also a jumbly catalogue of all kinds of things you'd never see in such a place, including a man writhing around outside, claiming that he has decided to take up serpents and strychnine. What's he doing there? This is one of Williams's Pentecostal weirdos—an unlikely visitor to the wrong side of the tracks, even if the crowds inside now include no-neck white fatsos. In the same song, Robert Johnson (dead long before Lucinda Williams was born) is playing guitar in the corner, when, suddenly, an odd sing-songy digressive poem pops up right in the middle, a non-sequitur remembrance of a self-destructive lover:

> Leaning against the railing of a Lake
>   Charles bridge
> Overlooking the river, leaning over the edge
> He asked me: Would you jump into the
>   water with me?
> I told him: No way, baby, that's your own
>   death, you see?

Who is this person in love with death and what does he have to do with the Magic City juke joint? This is Clyde, the Lake Charles obsessive, and he has nothing to do with Magic City (both the key and the tempo change to accommodate his visit), but he enjoys a rightful role in a work that, I now understand, is more poem than song, a surrealistic invocation of Southernness not unlike the kitschy religious shrines and turquoise serpents and bottle-cap Christs in Lucinda's own house. It's a bit of mythmaking, by a poet of loss, about a place that's receding from experience, and that might never have been there in the first place. And Williams knows this. She has never been to Rosedale, Mississippi. She's never seen



"Why don't you go back to your house for dessert and coffee?"

the Magic City juke joint, except in a picture book. For that matter, she's never been to a juke joint.

IN A MOOD

Lucinda is in a mood. Margaret Moser warned me about these moods. ("She gets all hinky and starts honking like a mule, and then folds up her arms and presses her lips together, and won't look at anyone, and you can stare at her for the longest time and won't have any idea of what the fuck is going through her mind.") Her road manager, Paul Monahan, warned me about them, too, pointing out that he had been her manager for only the last part of her tour, seven months, and in that short time half a dozen people had been fired (including two bus drivers), until the final week, when the remaining band members were let go, too. ("She is the sweetest, most thoughtful, kindest person you'll ever meet. And then, suddenly, the pressure will freak her out, and she doesn't know why it's freaking her out, and she can see she's freaking out but can't do a thing about it.") I once saw the early warning signs of a tempest in the making, after a concert, as everyone was piling into the bus, preparing for the all-night journey ahead, an early-evening show at a festival in Dallas the next day, when Lucinda said she was unhappy with the mix that night, very, very unhappy—something wasn't right, the guitarists were too showoffy, the drummer was too much on top of the beat, something, whatever it was ("What the fuck is it?"), it wasn't working—and was short-tempered and unapproachable, a sudden change in personality that Richard, her boyfriend, recognized and adapted to, not getting too close, finding things to do in another part of the bus, avoiding eye contact, saying nothing, knowing that her questions didn't need answers, until he felt he could make his excuses, and, with relief expressing itself across his face, slipped out for a drink before the bus left.

Tonight, I'm not sure what it is. It's late and Lucinda hasn't eaten ("God damn it, I let my blood sugar fall"), and she's unhappy with Nashville—not to mention Austin, Houston, Los Angeles, and, especially, New York ("I fucking hate fucking New York," she says, eyeballing me provocatively, knowing that I live in the city, and when I don't reply she repeats it, "I fucking hate New York," and when I still don't respond she says it once more)—but it doesn't matter what subject we happen to settle on as we drive into town for a late dinner. Whatever it is, Lucinda is going to attack it.

We've reached the Sunset Grill, an upmarket Nashville music-business hangout, and have been joined by two friends, Vicky, a neighbor, who sits beside Lucinda, and Dub ("the real thing"), who "does something with Steve Earle," and there is talk of other musicians appearing later, and, nearby, the tables are filling up with sidemen arriving from a session with Merle Haggard. Lucinda's state of mind—the blood-sugar level modestly fortified by a bread roll—might now be described as more attitude than mood. She was in a similar way the last time she was here—again, that exhilarating capacity of hers, this tightrope shuffle, of always being on the verge of losing it—when she started ranting about the spinelessness of Nashville music, and, getting more and more worked up, and oblivious of the shushing noises her friends were making, flapping their hands, trying to make her shut up, went on to denounce the overproduced formulaic country sound of Faith Hill in an outburst that culminated in the cry "Oh, fuck Faith Hill"—the allure of those alliterating "f"s proving irresistible—only to realize that an unfazed Faith Hill was sitting at a table right behind her.

Tonight, though, it's anything, everything, the cost of living, the high price of rented accommodation, the yuppies who are driving out the artists, the Southern obsession with guns, the racks of them in the backs of pickup trucks, the nutcases who collect them (including the stepfather of her boyfriend), leading to a repellent horror of the things ("I wish they were all outlawed"), and sliding, somehow, into a denunciation of the Second World War, in which, Lucinda says, the United States should never have got involved, a sentiment that enrages Richard, and, before I realize it, the two of them are in an argument of considerable passion—with Lucinda insisting that she is not an existentialist but a nihilist and doesn't care about the future of unborn children. I'm feeling awkward and not quite wanting to listen too carefully when Richard, having worked himself into a seeming rage, tells her to fuck off. Just like that. "Lu," he says, and takes a breath for effect, "fuck off."

Vicky, the neighbor, sitting opposite, freezes with her mouth open, her fork of food suspended over her plate, staring at Richard with incredulity, and you can see she's about to ask him if he has just said what she thinks she's heard, when her question is rendered redundant because Richard repeats the imperative, with a second-person variation for stress, "Fuck you, Lucinda." Vicky takes a breath. "Richard Price," she says, using his full name in that scolding-mother way, "how dare you—" but she's shut down once more when Richard tells Lucinda that she'd do him and the whole room a great favor if she simply fucked off. And then he adds, "Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you." What are any of us to do? Vicky's hands are fluttering. You can see that she wants to walk out, but she can't do that because she's upset on behalf of her friend—she can't leave her here with someone who is telling her to fuck off, even if he's the man she lives with. In fact, Vicky's indignation has mounted in this way because, in the distress of the moment, she is looking at Richard and not to her side, where Lucinda is sitting. Lucinda, I am surprised to observe, is not upset. All night long, she's been oppressive company—relentlessly whiny and confrontational and negative—until finally she has provoked her boyfriend into being a bad-ass ("You can't fucking mess with the Hombre," he is saying now, punctuating his declaration with the inevitable refrain, "so fuck off, Lucinda"), and Lucinda is loving it. She is beaming. Vicky is telling Richard that he can't get away with this, when, against my better judgment, I interrupt her and say, "No, no, you don't understand, they're liking this, this is actually the way they are together, didn't you know?" and I look over to Lucinda and her eyes are glistening—they're shiny with pleasure—and she's looking at Richard with an unnerving intensity. Then she starts cackling, that rhythmic Lucinda

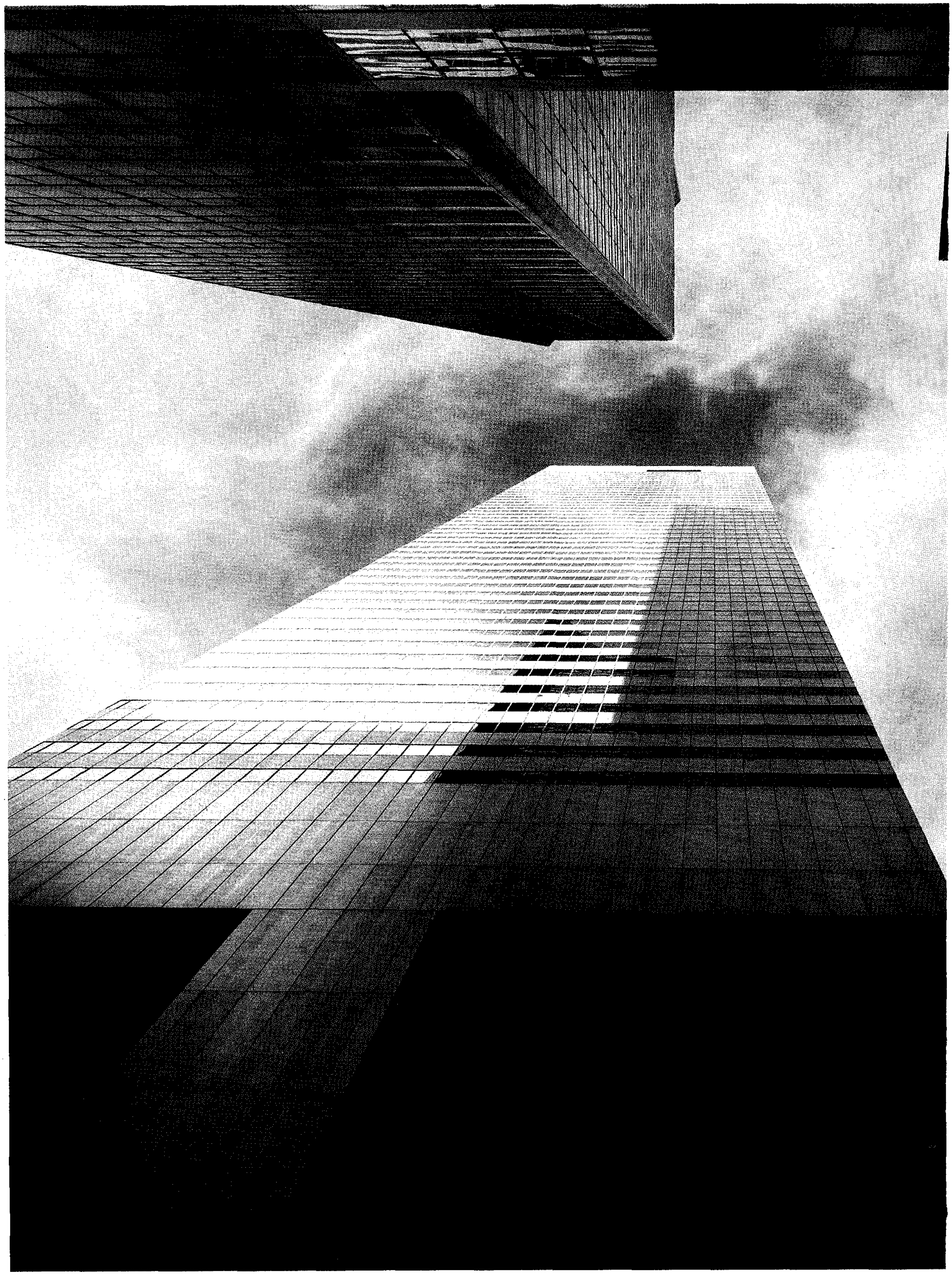
THE THREE GRACES
FAITH
If I just eat right and exercise, nothing terrible will happen.
HOPE
They're buying my novel!
R-R-RING!
R-R-RING!
CHARITY
She doesn't look so bad, considering that she's thirty-two.

laugh, easy and warm and deeply sexual.

What I find myself doing—inappropriately, of course—is rooting for them. The two of them have been seeing each other for nearly five years—the longest steady relationship in Lucinda's life—and, as a member of the audience witnessing the theatre of their being together, I've learned something of the trickiness of being Lucinda's guy. (It seems to work by inverting the conventional roles, so that Richard, for all his bad-ass Hombre attitude, is the patient one, the don't-worry-I'll-run-out-and-get-it one, the beck-and-call guy; in this household, there's no doubt who is wearing the trousers.) I saw them openly fighting once before, a tiff of a different order. This was in New Orleans, late, in a voodoo bar on Decatur Street. After a night of drinking and reminiscing by the river, Lucinda was suddenly in a mood. She was anxious, at two-thirty in the morning, that she hadn't written a song in three years. It was a curious time to be anxious, if only because, with concert dates booked for the next six months, there wasn't a lot she was going to be able to do to relieve her distress. The problem, it seemed, was that she was too happy. Richard didn't believe that this was a problem—happiness, he thought, was not a bad thing. But Lucinda wasn't listening. She was speaking longingly of her melancholy "Silver Lake period"—the time when, fourteen years before, living in a downtown apartment in Los Angeles and, having just broken up with Clyde, alone, emotionally wounded, with little money and few distractions, she was focussed and wrote some of her best songs, one after the other: "Crescent City," "Passionate Kisses," "Changed the Locks," and "Side of the Road," a song that, describing a lover's need to be apart from her beloved ("I want to be alone . . . I want to see what it feels like to be without you, I want to know the touch of my own skin"), was starting to seem uncomfortably apposite. Richard persisted. You didn't need to be unhappy to write, he was saying: it's possible to be both creative *and* personally fulfilled—to have good food *and* good wine *and* money *and* good sex *and* write good songs. But Lucinda wasn't buying it (and was impatient with him and thinking something like, Oh, shut up, Richard, what do you know? You're just a bass player), and, again, I found myself wanting both of them to be happy, *please*.

I'm wanting her to be normal. But Lucinda isn't "normal." On some level, the person and the persona in her songs are related, as though her volatile character—this capacity for not knowing how to stop—is a manifestation of the same unguarded personality who can't stop herself from falling wholly in love, over and over again. Or, perhaps, another way of thinking of it: this woman, who has never held a job for any time, doesn't get up in the mornings, is routinely three or four hours late to appointments, who walks out of studios because she doesn't feel like singing that day, and has a knack for both tantrum and wonder, achieves a childlike intensity of emotion in her songs because on some level she isn't, even at the age of forty-seven, quite an adult. And I am probably not the only one who isn't in a hurry to see her to grow up.

And then, wholly in character, persona and person still intertwined, last month Lucinda and her boyfriend decided to live apart, and Lucinda made plans to move into an airy loftlike apartment in downtown Nashville, not all that different from the airy apartment she once had in Silver Lake, and, alone now, with lots of space, and few distractions, she has started writing again. That happiness thing, who needs it? ♦



The glass-and-aluminum Citicorp Center, on Lexington Avenue between Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth Streets, was completed in 1978.

sits on four massive pillars above a sunken plaza.

PORTFOLIO

GOTHAM SHUFFLE

The wonder of New York is its discontinuity.

TEXT BY KURT ANDERSEN / PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT POLIDORI

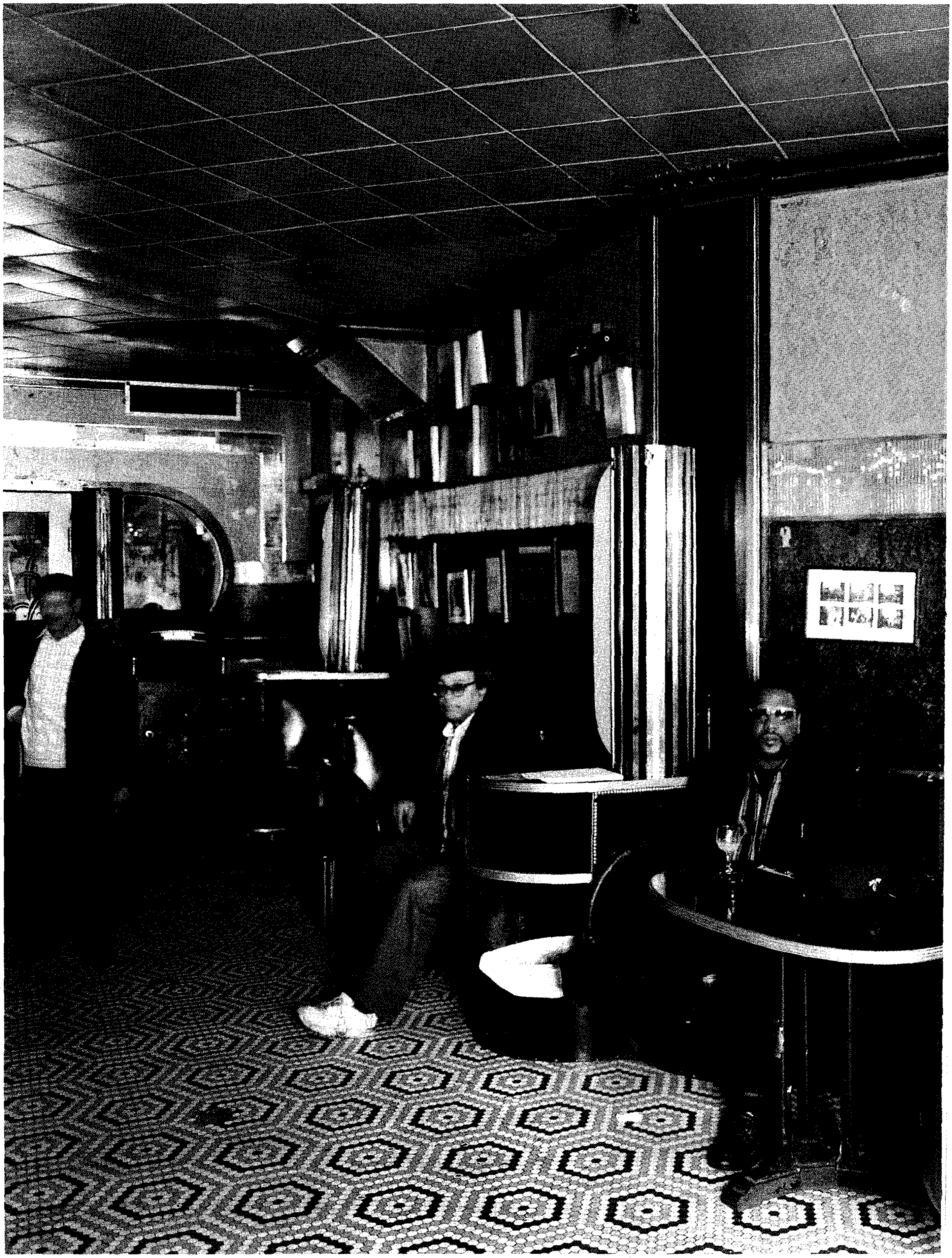
More than any other American place, New York has the power to make the urban fantasies of its residents and visitors feel real. The city is an anarchic theme park, with no imagineering team in charge and thus no overriding theme. Every fantasy has a chance here. In Manhattan, movie stars can make believe that they're not really famous, and magazine editors can make believe that they are. People with fantasies of corporate power can stoke them over lunch at The Four Seasons. An investment banker who wants to think of herself as cutting-edge can buy a four-million-dollar loft in TriBeCa, and people from Scarsdale who want to feel cosmopolitan can shuffle through the amped-up Rialto of Duffy Square after seeing "The Real Thing." For a decent simulation of Paris, there's Madison Avenue uptown, or restaurants like Pastis downtown. Central Park is a venue for many different fantasies—Hyde Park, an English country estate, Yosemite, whatever. Limousines are fantasy vehicles and tuxedos are fantasy garments; in no city on earth is there a greater density of limos or tuxes per acre. At Chelsea Piers, New Yorkers can pretend they're in Seattle or Minneapolis. Then, there are all the places that give "fantasy" its cheesy, back-of-the-classifieds tang, the down-at-the-heels town houses and lofts where people pay to slap and pinch and poke the bodies of strangers . . . or to be slapped and pinched and poked themselves.

My New York fantasy involves time travel. The commoner version of this, the sense of having been transported back to a particular historical moment, occurs more easily and naturally in other cities. Visiting New Orleans or Venice is very much like visiting the year 1819. Georgetown is 1865 through and through; in central London, it might as well be 1888; and in Palm Springs the year is permanently and precisely 1962. In this preservationist era, even cities like Omaha and San Diego have saved and earnestly burnished one neighborhood from one historic period.

New York City, on the other hand, always feels like the present. It's true that in Gramercy Park and Brooklyn Heights you can wallow in the pleasant sound-stage sensation of inhabiting the (last) Gilded Age, but right around the corner the city inevitably snaps you out of your National Trust idyll, throwing up a manic twentieth-century mishmash (East Fourteenth Street, say, with its new apartment blocks and old bodegas), or a mad, splendid multicultural collage (the pedestrian crowds of Hasids and West Indians and young white hipsters sharing the same sidewalks of northwest Brooklyn make a tableau that is possible only now).

That same sense of hurlyburly in architecture is what makes New York fantastic as a physical place as well—the presence of the whole span of urban history crammed into one feverish, unplanned jumble of houses and shops and bars and apartment blocks and office towers from every era. The wonder of Paris is its seamlessness. The wonder of New York is its discontinuity.

So it's not the ordinary, H. G. Wells-ish time-travel fantasies that this city indulges so well. Rather, the magic-realist conceit that New York inspires is weirder, more like what Disneyworld tries and fails to conjure: the sense that chunks of the past, a random smattering of entire build-



Duke Ellington performed at the Lenox Lounge, on 125th Street, which has been a venue for live music since 1934. The 1652 Wyckof

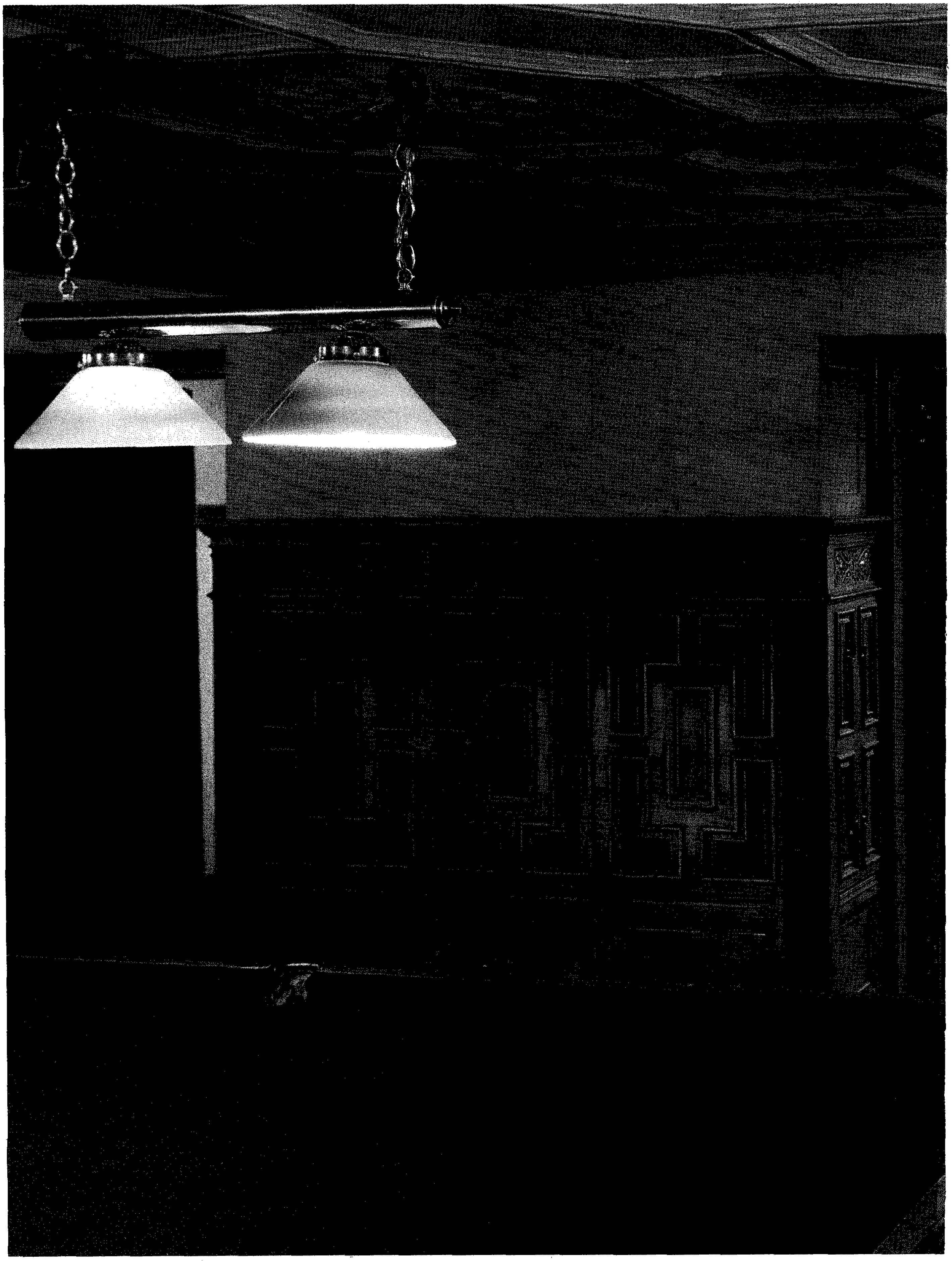
House, in Brooklyn, is the city's oldest building.

ings and individual rooms from the last four centuries—pieces of 1680 and 1846 and 1905, 1926 and 1948 and 1966 and 1977—have somehow hurtled through time to the same moment in the future. That is, to the present.

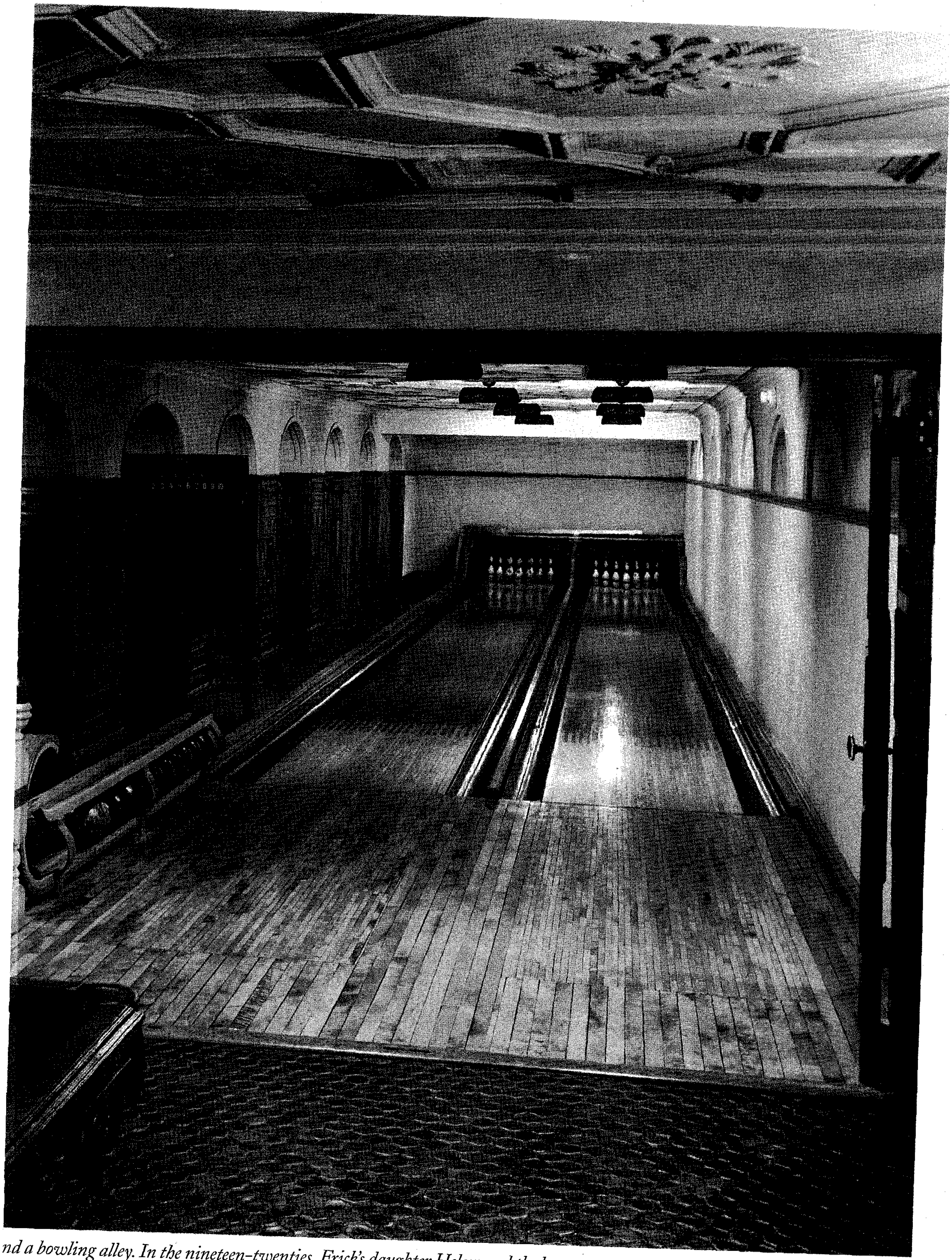
I had my first "Twilight Zone" glimmerings of this notion right after I moved to the city, in the seventies, during long walks up and down the West Side, through Clinton and Chelsea and the not yet rechristened TriBeCa. The triggers were the old signs painted on the sides of brick buildings, faded and flaking but still legible advertisements for ironmongers, milliners, patent medicines. I reacted the same way everyone does to those pre-Zip Code, pre-area-code signs: I was both charmed and saddened, as if I'd heard a couple of bars of Jelly Roll Morton or "Rhapsody in Blue" suddenly seep out of the bricks. The signs are pure antiques, fossils of companies and products that no longer exist.

Then one Saturday in the early eighties I happened to visit an apartment on the Upper East Side. The apartment, six or eight rooms in a big white brick building, had clearly not been redecorated since 1963, when it was brand-new, which meant multicolored George Nelson sofas and plastic Eames chairs and Ben Shahn prints on the walls. What looked funny in 1980 had been fashionable fifteen or twenty years earlier (and would be fashionable again fifteen or twenty years hence), but it struck me at the time as a kind of in-situ museum installation—an accidental real-life Sturbridge Village of the early sixties in the middle of Manhattan. Unlike the signs on the sides of old buildings, the apartment wasn't an abandoned ruin but something actual and alive.

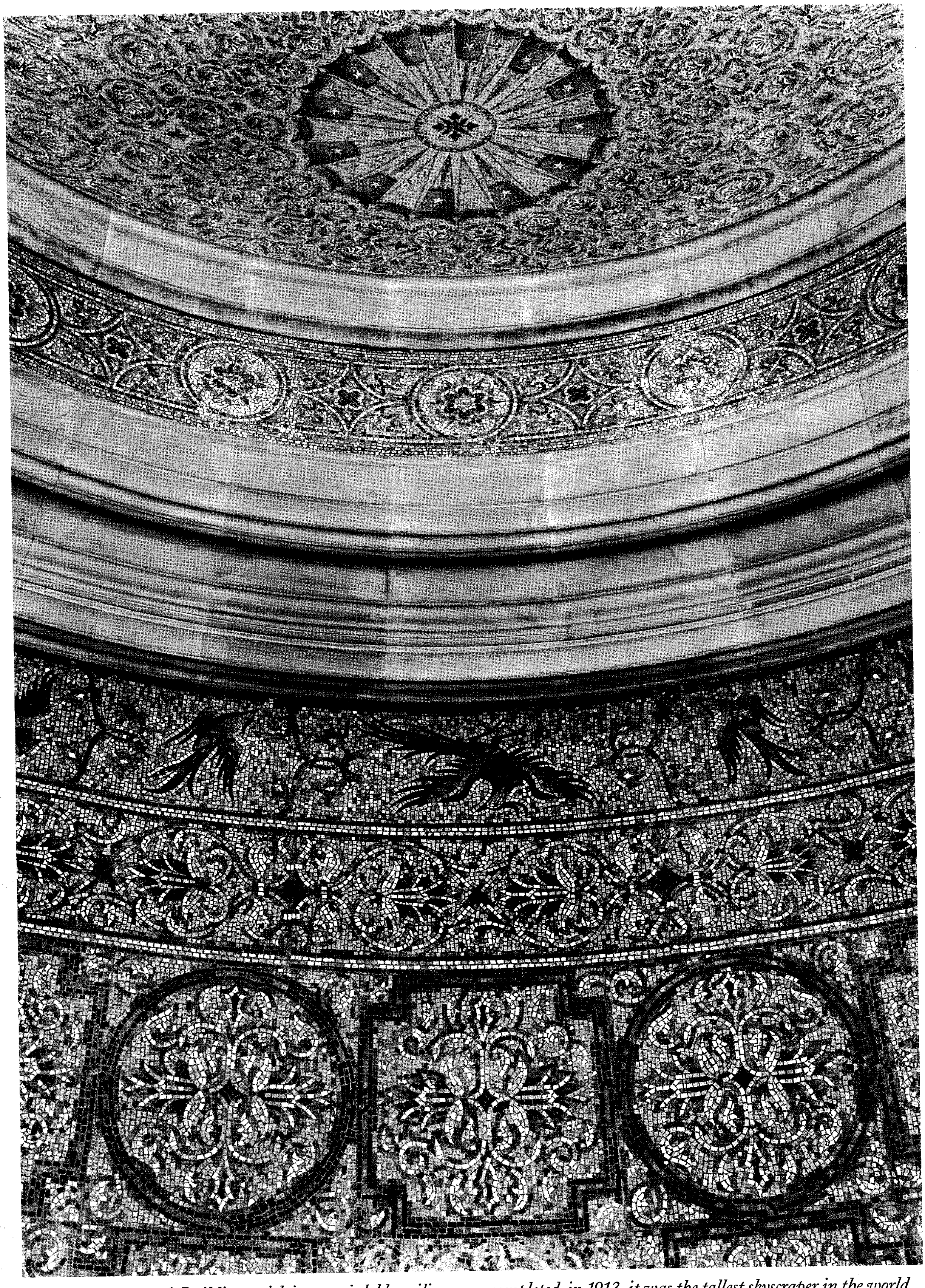
From that point on, I couldn't help seeing New York as the terminus of a vast architectural time-travel scheme. What makes this possible are all the buildings and rooms in the city that are not ghost architecture but serve the purposes they always have. The White Horse Tavern and McSorley's Old Ale House are still, at least for the moment, the White Horse Tavern and McSorley's Old Ale House, slightly rank and functioning artifacts of the nineteenth century. The Brooklyn Bridge, the American Museum of Natural History, and the Dakota do what they did a hundred years ago. At this turn of the century, the library on Fifth Avenue is still the library, and the Beaux-Arts Grand Central is still a railway terminal. The Woolworth and Flatiron and Chrysler Buildings and Radio City, Grace Church and The Players club and the golf-course clubhouse at Van Cortlandt Park, the Saarinen terminal at J.F.K. and Kevin Roche's Ford Foundation atrium, Elaine's, Lincoln Center—none of them have been gutted



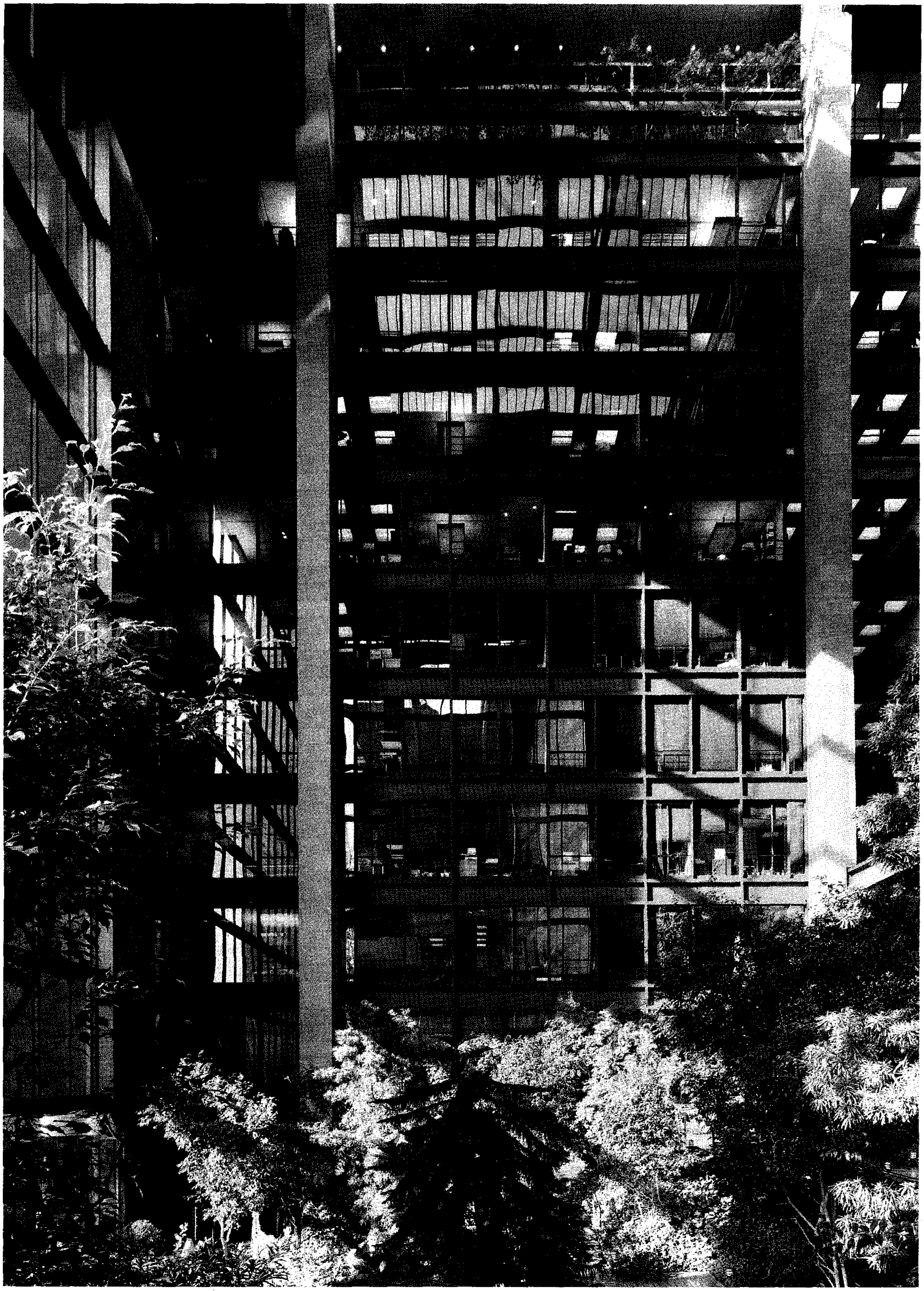
The basement of the Frick Collection, on East Seventieth Street, built as a residence forHenry Clay Frick in 1914, houses a snooker tabl



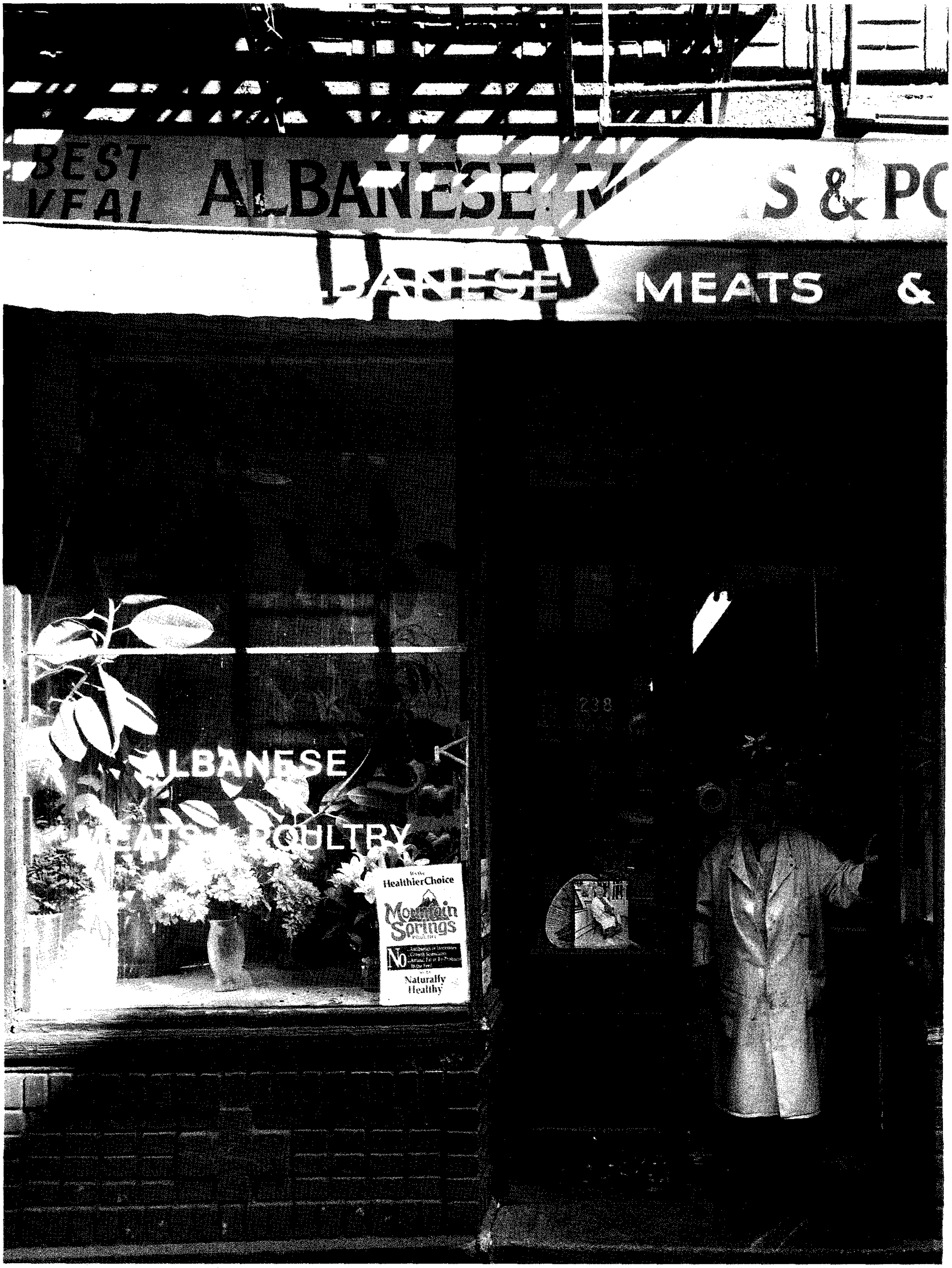
nd a bowling alley. In the nineteen-twenties, Frick's daughter Helen used the lanes as storage space for her collection of art books.



When the Woolworth Building, with its mosaic lobby ceiling, was completed, in 1913, it was the tallest skyscraper in the world.



The enclosed garden of the Ford Foundation headquarters, on East Forty-second Street, built in 1967, has been widely imitated.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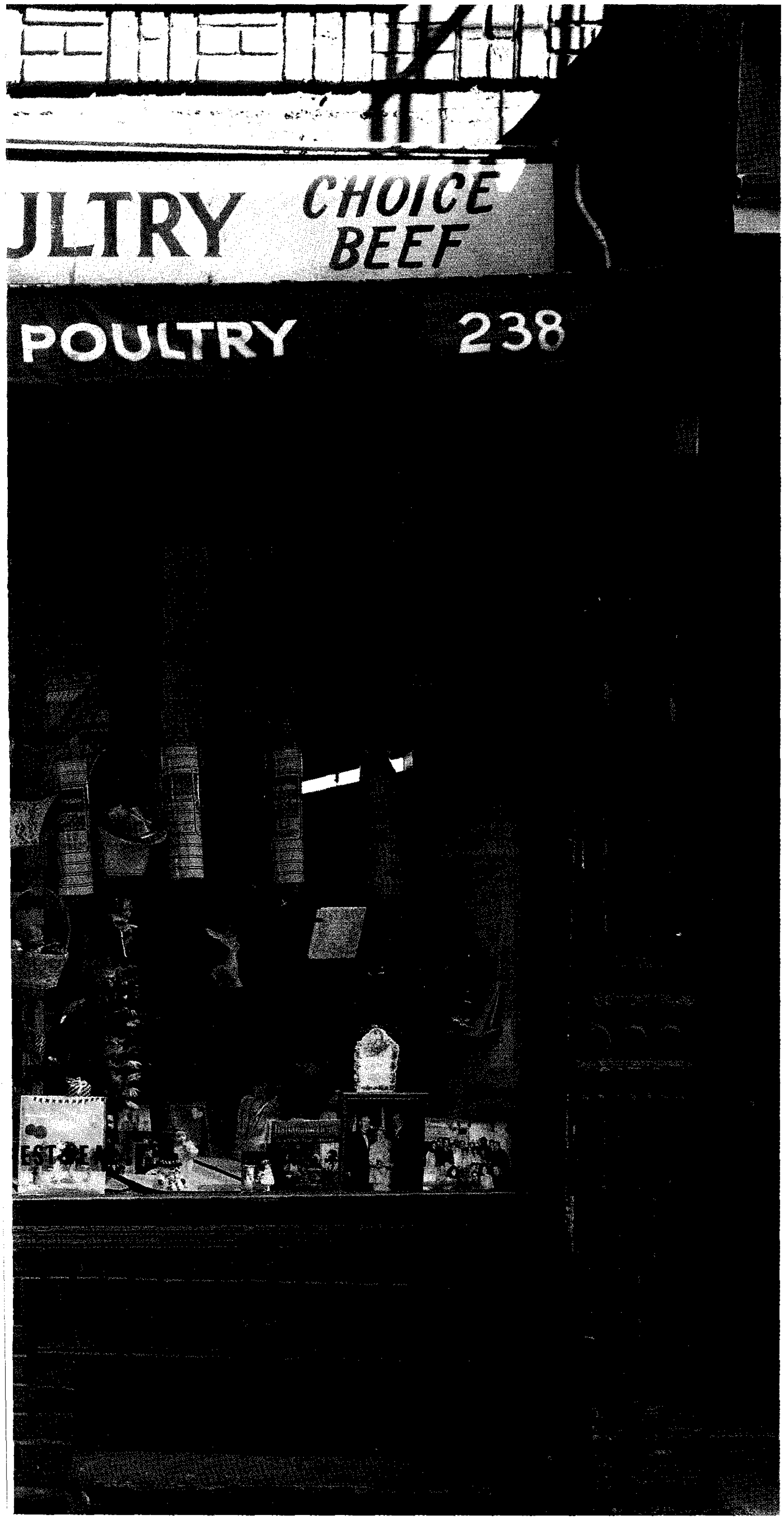
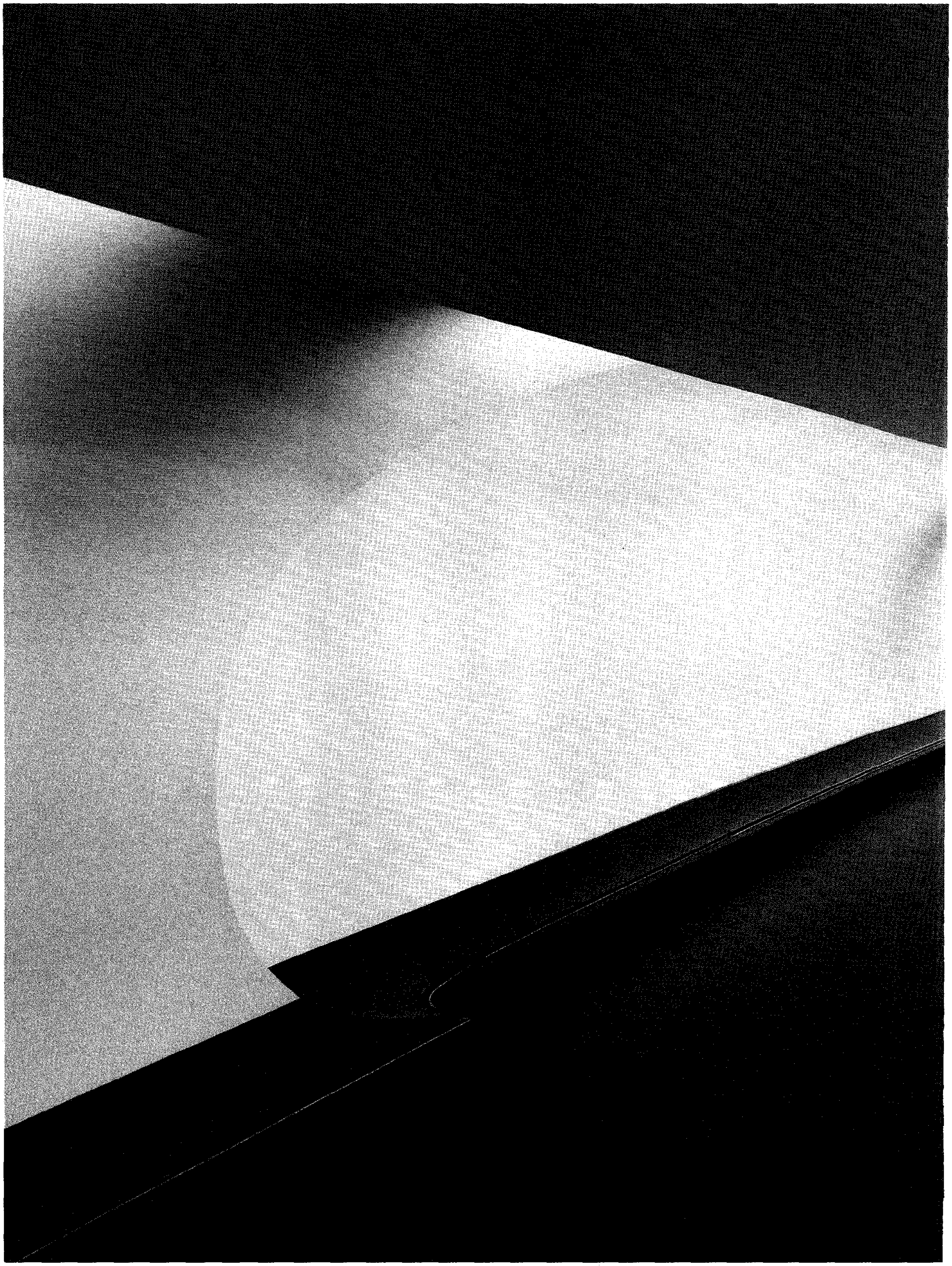
Maryann Albanese, standing in the doorway of Albanese Meats & Poultry, at 238 Elizabeth Street, in Little Italy, has worked as



butcher in her family's store since the early nineteen-twenties.

or embalmed and turned into cutesy-pie versions of their former selves. These pieces of the city remain basically as they were in 1885 and 1906 and 1927 and 1966. But they've all been whisked here, to 2000.

And the functioning pieces of the past that most sightseers don't recognize as *sights*, especially the homely background bits that architects and planners call "vernacular," are even better for inducing this recombinant architectural fantasia—places like the Albanese butcher shop, on Elizabeth Street in Little Italy, which looks and smells today as it must have in the early nineteen-twenties; the Lenox Lounge, still intensely redolent of mid-century Harlem; the narrow, smoky, adamantly pre-nouvelle French restaurants of the West Forties; the hundred-year-old garment workshops on Eldridge Street; Sunnyside Gardens, in Queens; Eisenberg's Sandwich Shop, which remains a little bit of 1929 on lower Fifth Avenue; and stolid, noble Stuyvesant Town, 1949 New York in a nutshell. The secret bowling alley in the bowels of the Frick Collection—still there! in the year 2000!—seems literally fictional, like a page of Mark Helprin or Steven Millhauser come to life. The Brutalist-lite Viacom headquarters, on Broadway at Forty-fifth Street, *is* the late seventies. Certain stretches of the Lower East Side, with their rows of tenement houses, look the way they did when Berenice Abbott photographed them, seventy years ago. The lobby of the Time-Life Building is still the epitome of three-Martini modernism, just as Eero Saarinen's white wormhole passageway at J.F.K.'s T.W.A. terminal evokes that happy sci-fi moment when jet travel seemed sexy and grand. These places are remarkable not so much individually as collectively, and not because they provide the tidy touristic experience of "stepping back in time"—Jay-Z raps never blasted out of any Eldridge Street shop-front in 1911, as far as I know—but because each one has landed neatly and intact here, in our time. ♦



Interior view of the T.W.A. Terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport, designed by Eero Saarinen. When it was complete

n 1962, it evoked for passengers the futuristic glamour of the new age of jet travel.

FICTION

A HUNDRED AND ELEVEN YEARS WITHOUT A CHAUFFEUR

BY MURIEL SPARK

Our grandmothers, our great-grandfathers, and all our other antecedents: they lived ordinary lives, had pains, went to work, talked, kept busy, had sex—full days and full nights, as long as all that lasted. I see no reason to drool over them. They did not drool over us. They thought of the future, of the generations to come, but only in the most general terms, obviously.

When they wrote memoirs and letters, we know that it is not the whole story. When they left only their photographs and a few imputed sayings and habits, still less have we got the whole story. We have their birth and marriage records and their tombstones in some country churchyard, as in the case of my forebears.

When it came to producing photographs for my biographer, Joe, there was little to go on. I hadn't looked them over for at least twenty years. They had been tucked into a drawer in a spare bedroom, together with a tiny musical box that still played a tinkly tune when wound up, a few old reels of black cotton, a tin box of Venus pencils (unused, a very useful find). There was also a piece of stone from an excavation of antiquity, but which?

I took out the photographs and spread them on a table. Is that all? I could have sworn there had been more. In fact, I knew there had been more. Where were they all? People, even one's friends, do go off with things. But their main objects of acquisition are books. Guests go off with books out of the guest room, but not photos, not old photos of dull people of modest means.

I looked at the photographs one by one, to make sure I wasn't dreaming. Gladys was there, the wife of my mother's uncle Jim. Jim was sitting with a hand on his knee, a watch chain across his belly, while Gladys stood beside him, one hand on his shoulder. Beside Gladys was a photographer's prop—a pillar surmounted by a bunch of flowers. Date circa 1860.

Next, Mary-Ann, Nancy, Maud, and my great-grandmother Sarah Rowbottom, who lived to a hundred and five, and here shows that possibility already at sixty-five. They are wearing their best frocks, tightly corseted waists, prominent busts, as breasts were called, lots of rows of lace, and always a locket hanging round their necks, enclosing God knows whose photos, whose locks of hair. Mary-Ann, who was the first to get married, wore a dark brooch. Their hair was done up, all in order. Lower middle class of those days, aspiring. They were corn dealers and managed quite well.

They lie in Vicarage Road Churchyard, Watford, every one. They are marked by two stones: Deeply Mourned.

I explained them to Joe, and added what I knew of family lore.

Next came my mother, born a hundred and eleven years back, dead these twenty-seven years. And a cousin whose name I can't recall, but who, I know, was very ambitious. Alas, she never achieved her ambition, which was to own a Rolls-Royce with a chauffeur to drive her from shop to shop, as was possible in those days. This cousin—what was her name? Oh, well, she became a Mrs. Henderson, wife of an accountant, and got as far as Paris on the Golden Arrow one year. No Rolls, no chauffeur.

But where was that other photo of Mrs. Henderson, the one that I remembered well because it was so uncharacteristically informal, where she was standing over her sewing machine? She was slightly bent, in profile, slim-waisted and handsome. Someone with a camera had caught her examining the bobbin of her beloved treadle-operated Singer. Something was wrong with the machine, and Mrs. Henderson—what was her name?—was looking intently at it. An enchanting photograph. It was gone. Someone had removed it.

The same with a few others I now remembered. My paternal grandmother, from a Jewish family in Lithuania, very blond and Polish-looking, her hair piled and plaited, not at all Jewish to look at, unlike my grandfather, with his lovely smile inside his beard; he was so like my father, who, however, was always clean-shaven. My grandmother Henrietta's beautiful photograph was missing. I remembered her so well in the photograph, never having known her in the flesh. I remembered the large space between the eyes, which I have inherited. Blue eyes. Where had she gone?

I thought of all the people who had slept in the spare room, and of others who had been within easy access to it. Some dozens of friends over the years. Who would have an interest in those meaningless photographs? Sometimes, because I am a writer, journalists have been known to snaffle a photograph of me without permission, but these old Victorian and Edwardian pictures, without even artistic merit?

I concentrated on the bundle of photographs that were left to me. They weren't a bad selection, enough to illustrate my long-ago origins and, in some cases, my memories. I gave them to Joe and put away the rest. I had other things to think of.

Damian de Dogherty—oh, my God, I haven't thought of him for five years. Before that, he saw to it that I thought of him every month, if not every day. I lived in Paris at the time.

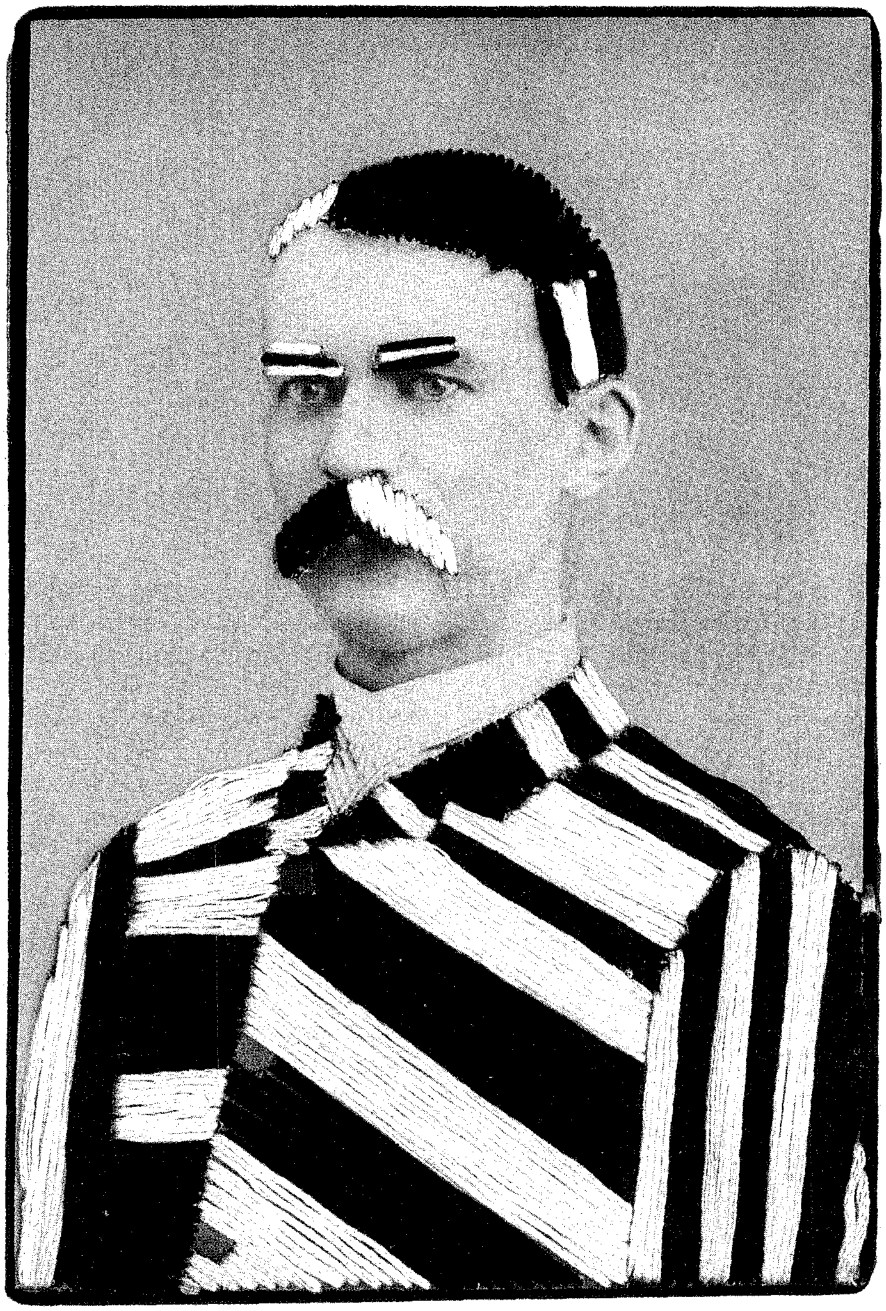
According to his spin, or, rather, one of his spins, the family were Huguenots originating from Ireland, taking refuge in France; members of the family were later in the service of Maria Theresa of Austria, who conferred on them a princedom. Being modest people, they accepted to be merely barons, and he, the last survivor of the family, was Baron Damian de Dogherty.

Damian was, I must say, a lot of fun.

JOSEPH HEIDECKER, "UNTITLED" (1999)/RICCO/MARESCA GALLERY

That is, he was fun at the dinner table and of diminishing fun elsewhere. He was a positive bore on the beach, where he would leave whatever companion he was with (he was two ways) and take his good slinky body after strange gods such as arose from the glittering sea.

One of Damian's many curious characteristics was his habit of suddenly falling asleep. I believe it is called narcolepsy. It might be at a quiet meeting of friends sitting around a table drinking in a mild way, or in a library while he was taking notes from a book (he loved to study), or sitting beside you on a sofa. Suddenly, he would be gone into sleep. It was quite a healthy sleep, and eventually his friends gave up being alarmed. I always understood this trait as a reaction to reality; all in a moment, I felt, something would cause him to face an unacceptable truth, and he just tuned out. I still think I was right, there. His narcosis was at least partly psychological.



In my early acquaintance with Damian, I took his story at its charming face value. I addressed him on the envelopes of my letters as Baron de Dogherty, strange as it sounded. His name was not to be found in any of the reference books for the titles and old families of Europe, although he claimed that it was to be found somewhere. This information, unsought, went unchecked so far as I was concerned. According to those who had known him some years before, he had been married to a rich Peruvian girl. They had gone their separate ways. It was said that she was a talented photographer, still practicing in Paris. I took in this fact vaguely; only afterward did I have some reason to bring it to mind.

He practiced as a genealogist sometimes. I knew he had many French and Italian friends. Some of the latter were delighted when Damian "discovered" their noble origins. They were able to call themselves "Baron," too.

I tried to get to his real personality, but after a while I realized that there was none. He was, in fact, pure fake.

To a considerable extent, I think, Damian believed his own stories. He was trying to write an autobiography, for which reason, I think, he rang me or dropped in frequently.

"I've come to the bit when my aunt La Comtesse Clémentine de Vevey came to visit me at school in Switzerland."

"I believe you went to school in Salt Lake City," I said, having been so informed by one of his schoolmates.

"Oh, that was earlier."

In my role as literary adviser, I suggested that he should turn his autobiography into a novel. He adopted this suggestion.

Another strange fact: everybody liked to be with Damian while he was alive; he was greatly sought after for weekends, dinner parties, and simple picnics in the country; however, in spite of his decided popularity, when he died he was not mourned in any sort of proportion to the force of his attractiveness in life. He was not grieved over at all. He was here, he made us smile, nobody believed a word he said, then he was gone.

Shortly after his death, I was in a bookshop in Ghent, rummaging through some old prints. I came across a pile of photographs, all in quite ornate frames. People would buy these, the owner was explaining to me, precisely for the frames. "But personally," he said, "I also find the photographs very attractive, very nostalgic."

I found myself looking at my hard-

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—*Franz Wright*

working grandmother, my great-aunts Nancy and Sally. There was Mary-Ann. And Sarah Rowbottom, stout and bold. And Gladys with a regal sash across her bosom.

But these were not the original faded sepia images. They were blacker and whiter, with an attempt at a sort of golden-brown haze.

"Where did these come from?" I said.

"I bought them in England," said the owner. "They were in a house sale."

There was something wrong with my grandmother. My God, she was wearing a tiara and round her neck was the unmistakable Order of the Golden Fleece, an ornate necklace with a ram's skin hanging from it. The same sort of thing with my great-aunt Nancy. Gone was her ebony locket, and in its place was a medal that was later identified as the Order of the Black Eagle, a Prussian order exclusive to royal families. My humble relatives, one by one, had been exalted with Orders and Garters, ropes of pearls (my grandmother Henrietta had seven strands), bejewelled tiaras. My great-uncle Jim had the Manchurian Order of the Dragon on his breast.

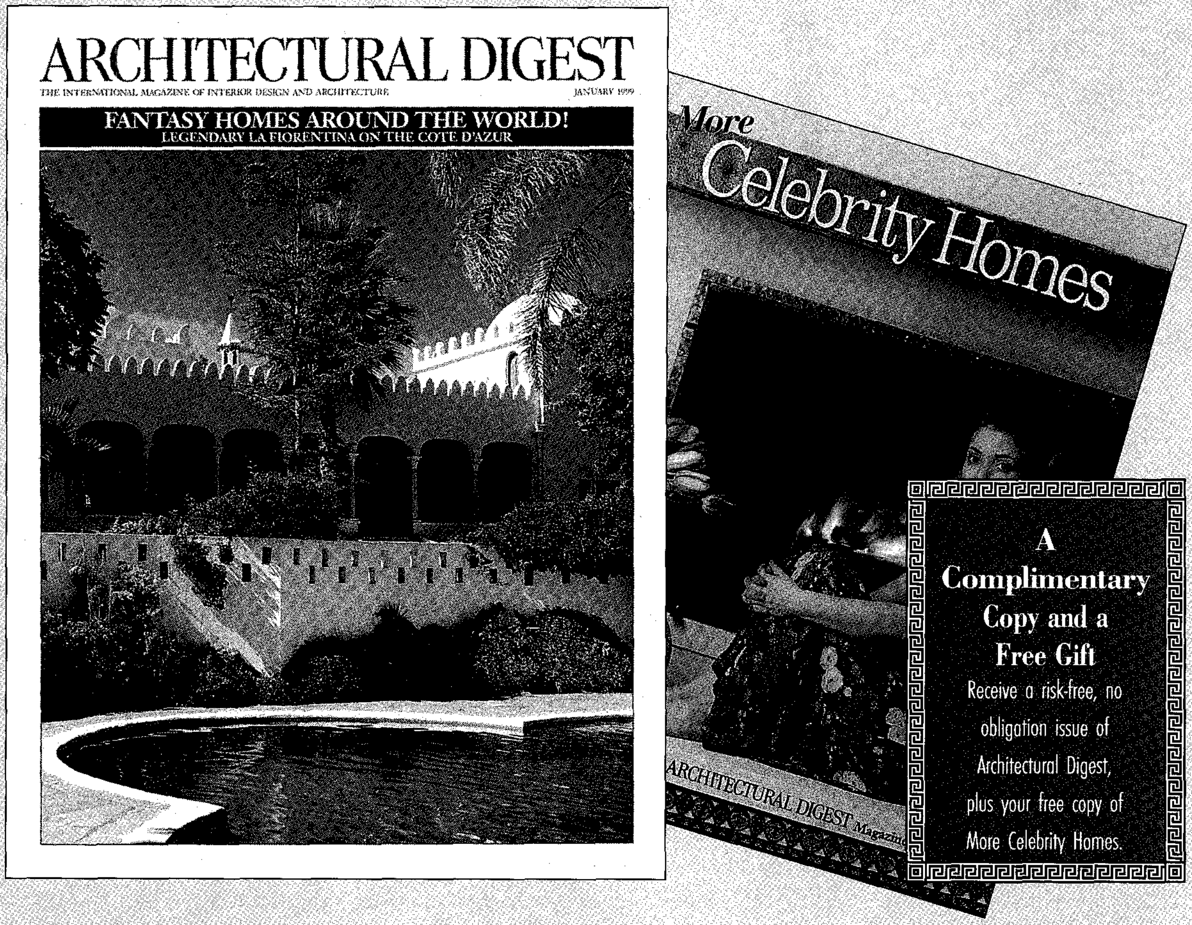
"Who were these people?" I inquired.

"Oh, they are the noble relations of the late Baron de Dogherty," said the owner. "These photographs were on the walls of his study. No great interest except for the frames. He was very well connected, of course, so perhaps historians . . ."

I bought the pictures, without the frames, for a price that was too high, although, according to the owner, it was too low—the usual thing.

On examination by a photographic expert, and comparison with the photos that had not been stolen, it was plain that they had been rephotographed, with those fake insignia, about which Damian had been a real expert, tricked in. He had also learned something from his marriage to that Peruvian photographer; it had not been a total loss. But this was what he had lived for: the Order of Henry the Lion, the Order of the Starry Cross, even the Order of the Red Flag.

I love these fake pictures, all of them. But my favorite is that of my mother's cousin, slim Mrs. Henderson, in profile, stooping not to examine her sewing machine but to enter her superimposed Rolls. And standing by the door of the car is the superimposed chauffeur, her dream of a lifetime come true. ♦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ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

THE CRITICS

THE CURRENT CINEMA

IN YOUR FACE

John Woo's mission is to give us more Tom Cruise.

BY ANTHONY LANE

The big problem with the new John Woo movie is not what it's about, or whether it adds lustre to the epistemological conundrum that is world cinema, but what we are supposed to call the damn thing. In my innocence, I had presumed that any sequel to Brian DePalma's "Mission: Impossible" would bear the title "Mission: Impossible II" or "Mission: Impossible—Just Got a Teeny Bit Harder," but apparently the latest installment would prefer to be known as "M: i-2," which looks almost as ugly as it sounds. It is an appellation fit only for a laptop, and, indeed, the whole film is strewn with magic Apples; none of the characters could conceivably go to the john without downloading the national sewage blueprints.

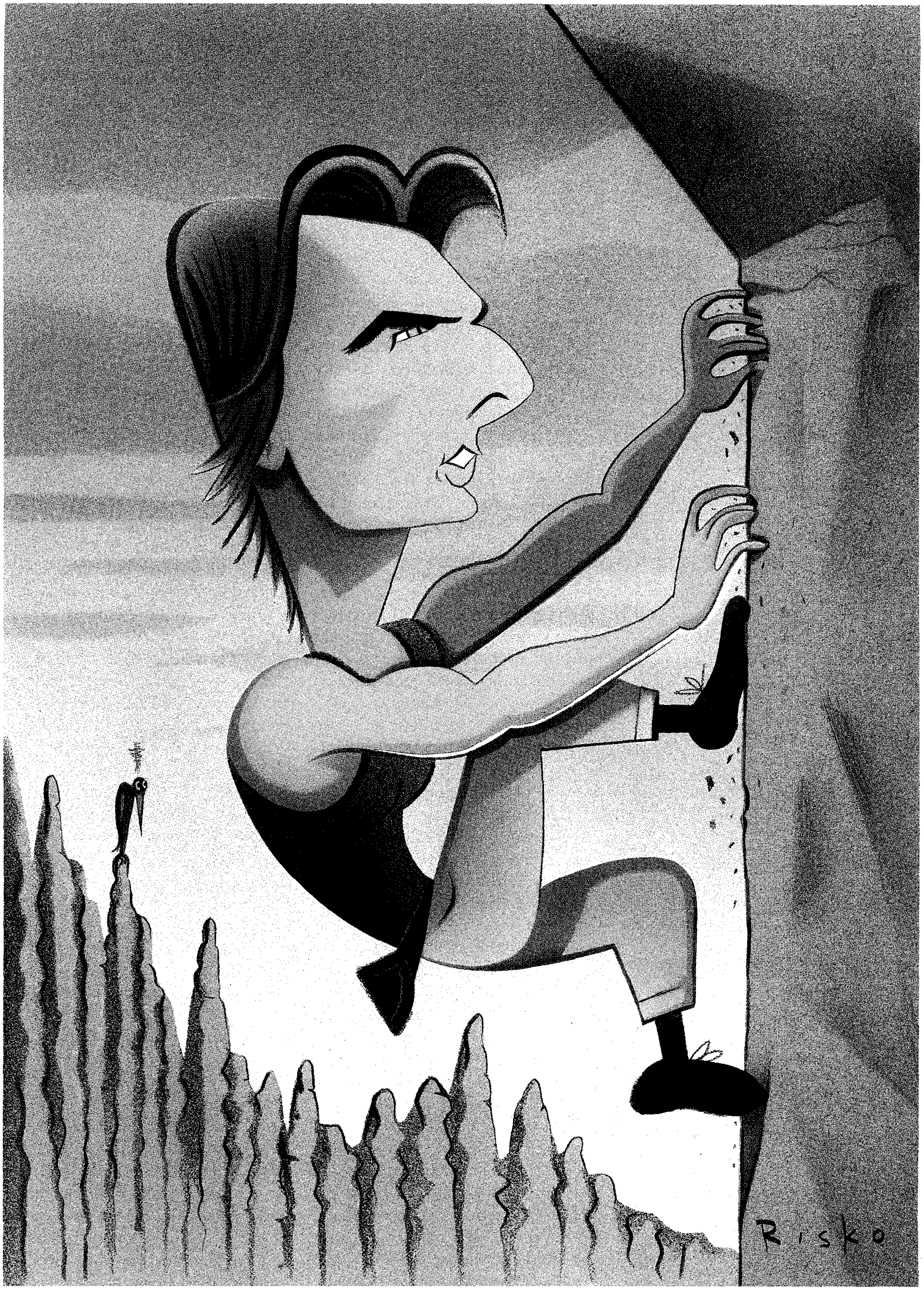
"M: i-2" stars T.C.—Tom Cruise to you and me, although he would be happy with Top Cat. Once again, he plays Ethan Hunt, who, along with Luther Strickell (Ving Rhames), is the sole survivor of the crack espionage team that made such a hash of things in the first movie. (Not even the theme tune pulled through; the Lalo Schifrin original, the punchiest riff since "The Magnificent Seven," has been hard-rocked out of all recognition.) This time, Ethan's mission, should he choose to write it down on a stickie and put it on the door of his fridge, is to save the world from a lethal virus called Chimera—a real virus, of the kind that makes your ears bleed, although you might think that Ethan would be more vulnerable to the kind that barbecues your hard drive. The first step toward saving the world, as always, is to recruit a slinky young thief wearing a tight lace dress and a Bulgari necklace down her cleavage. To this end, Ethan has to fly from Australia to Spain, or, rather, in the refreshing visual shorthand of "M: i-2," from an aerial shot of the Sydney Opera House to a closeup of a flamenco dancer going clackety-clack-*clack*. It's the old rule of blockbusters: the more global a movie's ambitions, the more it flattens the globe into a pile of picture postcards.

The thief's name is Nyah (Thandie Newton), and if only she'd said it loud enough to Tom Cruise he might have gone away and left her alone. As it is, he lands her in the deepest of pickles. She is the ex of Sean Ambrose (Dougray Scott), a former associate of Ethan's who has gone to the bad; last seen jumping out of a 747 over the Rockies, he is suspected of stealing Chimera, and Nyah can confirm those suspicions only by showing up and pretending to be in love with him all over again. What we have, in short, is a reheated "Notorious," with Newton in the two-timing Ingrid Bergman role; the screenwriter, Robert Towne, even supplies a long scene at the racetrack. Now, "Notorious," being perhaps the most beguiling and heartsick thriller ever made, is not easy to keep up with, and I was hardly surprised to see "M: i-2" begin to pant and flag. It was when Nyah, silk scarf fluttering at her neck, took about ten minutes to walk the length of a jetty toward the waiting Ambrose that I felt the audience shift impatiently in their seats.

What they were experiencing was an entirely novel sensation: a boring John Woo picture. I know it sounds ridiculous; one might as well talk of a plodding Ernst Lubitsch or a flat-chested Fellini. But there were times when "M: i-2" seemed happy to neglect its Woovian duties. Working through the director's back catalogue, from the American hits like "Face/Off" and "Broken Arrow" to the purer anarchy of his Hong Kong flicks, I felt honored to be in the company of an artist who had such intense designs on my eyeballs and so minimal a claim on my brain. His beginnings are notably toothsome; after little more than ten minutes of "Hard Boiled," for instance, Chow Yun-Fat and his well-armed friends have whittled an entire restaurant down to the consistency of bean sprouts. The great Chow ends up with his face masked in white flour and iced with lines of blood; it could be some ancient, theatrical image of vengeance. By contrast, the new film is soft-boiled; true, we get a cliffhanger before the opening credits, but it consists simply of Tom Cruise hanging from a cliff. There is no plot on the move, and no other character in sight: nothing but pecs and peaks, and the first of a thousand closeups. Chow's face told us what had happened; Tom's face tells us who he is.

The unpalatable truth about this new "Mission: Impossible" is that it is, to a mountainous degree, a Tom Cruise enterprise. He co-produced both movies, but this time you feel his touch on every frame. Early on, during the scenes in Seville, there is a shot of Ethan's profile as he walks away. It serves no dramatic purpose, apart from allowing us to muse on his slightly unwise choice of a

ROBERT RISKO



Cruise in the sequel to "Mission: Impossible." Whatever he is doing, the camera is there to record the ebb and flow of his locks.

rabbit-colored suède blouson; if there is a point, it is his hair, the indubitable star of this movie. Gone is the sharp, military crop of "Mission: Impossible." In comes the long, floppy look, as pioneered by Ilie Nastase in the early seventies. Whatever Ethan is doing in the story—tipping his motorcycle forward for an unprecedented front wheelie, taking his Porsche for a spin up against Nyah's Audi—the camera is there to record the ebb and flow of his locks. Until now, John Woo has used slow motion as a homage to the unbeatable lightness of being; not since Sam Peckinpah has anyone striven so tirelessly to show the human body rising to the occasion—all but soaring—while everything around it comes apart. The technique is a lie, of course, but a gracious one, and I was crestfallen to find it doing the work of a L'Oréal commercial. Why, I asked myself, should we pay good money to see Tom Cruise's coiffure bounce in creamy waves? Because he's worth it.

There is nothing new, and nothing especially damnable, in the notion of a vanity project. It's a tradition that has prospered ever since Dietrich gave instructions to her cinematographers on the best way to illuminate her cheekbones, and, if we are honest, our grasp of what we worship most hotly in Hollywood is inextricable from the splendor with which the actors' features, as tall as houses, fill our screens. But even von Sternberg, or the Hitchcock who lavished his ruthless love on Grace Kelly, knew that there were tales to be told, whereas the attention paid to Cruise—Cruise as icon, jaw pornographically ajar—actually interrupts the onward rush of events. It is not for me to comment on the extensive reshoots that were reputedly ordered on "M: i-2," let alone on the question of who ordered them; suffice it to say that the film never finds its balance, jerking awkwardly as it does from the bone-bruising exhaustion of violence to slack romantic canoodlings. There was a hint of desire in the first "Mission: Impossible." Cruise touched his cheek wistfully after a kiss from Emmanuelle Béart, but the rest of their relationship must have slipped to the cutting-room floor. The new film wants to be warmer, but, for all the glories of Thandie Newton, Cruise is close to unreachable; you can't imagine him giving way to her, and for some reason Towne—the man who wrote "The Last Detail" and "Chinatown"—can't find a crisp seductive patter for the two of them to share. After the shuddering car chase, her first words to Ethan are "What's your name?" She might as well be asking for his license. "Damn, you're beautiful," he says the next morning—perfectly true, but Cary Grant would have demanded a rewrite. And the reason Ethan hires her? "It takes a thief to catch a thief." I wonder who thought of that.

The final third of "M: i-2" works hard to make up for lost time. We get exploding fuel tanks, motorcycles locking horns like stags, and a sandy, sweat-lashed, slo-mo martial-arts demonstration in which Cruise spends so long in the air, getting his little legs ready for the killer kick, that his opponent could easily wander off, have a cup of coffee and a doughnut, and still make it back in time to get it in the neck. People laughed at the sight of this, and it was a generous laugh, gladdened by the thought that John Woo had, at the last gasp, recovered his comedy of excess. But it's too much, too late; Heaven knows, the first "Mission: Impossible" was a mess, but it respected the finicky teamwork of the TV series, whereas Cruise now has the air of a lone wolf. Apart from an uncredited cameo by Anthony Hopkins, there are no first-rank stars to obscure Cruise's glare; he is buoyed along by a Scot, an Englishwoman, and a couple of Aussies. Even then, half of them seem to have rubber Tom Cruise masks that they don and doff like hats. "The hardest part of being you is grinning idiotically," Ambrose says to Ethan—a nice touch, and all too credible. People switch identities in this film with bewildering ease, and there were moments when it felt like an extended dénouement from an episode of "Scooby-Doo": "Why, it's old Mr. Cruise from the fighter-pilot movie!" If I followed the island shoot-out correctly, Tom Cruise must have been carrying a spare Tom Cruise face in his backpack all along, just in case. Damn, he's beautiful. If you love the guy, this is your picture, but, if you like your thrills more evenly spread, here is the bad news: "M: i-2" is N: f-ing: G. ♦

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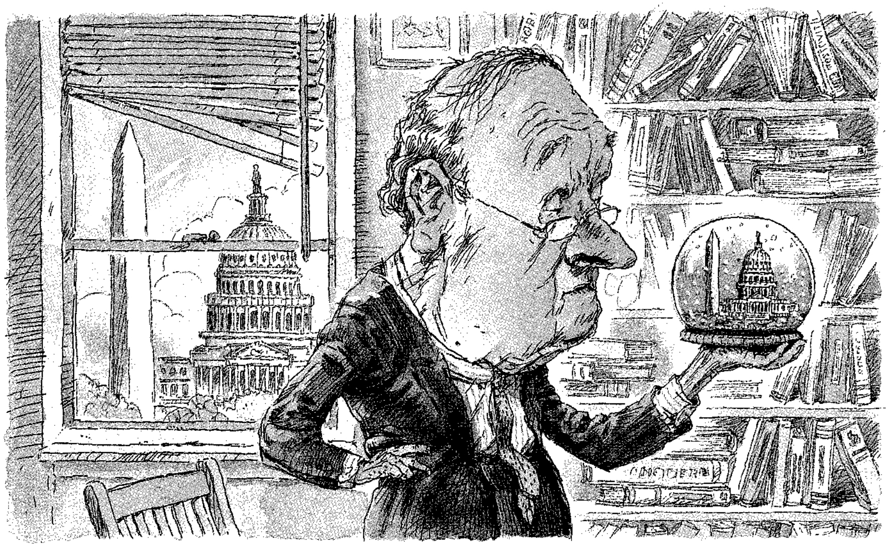
WHIMPER ON THE RIGHT

Those hard-to-please conservatives.

BY FAREED ZAKARIA



Modern conservatism was shaped by the struggles of the Cold War. Some conservatives are still pining for the thrill of the fight.

JOHN CUNEO

The day after John McCain won the New Hampshire Republican primary, William Kristol, the publisher of *The Weekly Standard,* wrote an article in the Washington *Post* declaring, "The conservative movement . . . is finished." Actually, the conservative movement was in trouble before New Hampshire. The front-runner, George W. Bush, had entered the campaign as a "compassionate conservative," championing the cause of those "left behind" by the current economic boom. He had critcized conservatives for being too gloomy about America and had accused congressional Republicans of balancing the budget "on the backs of the poor." Both his record as the governor of Texas and his proposals to date are distinctly middle of the road. The Bush campaign was thrown off course because it had planned to run in precisely the political space that McCain eased into.

Kristol's *Post* article was meant to be an obituary for the Republican establishment. But many of its members, like Bush, seem to be thriving. Republican governors run thirty-one states (including seven of the largest), states that are home to seventy per cent of the nation's population. They have an average job-approval rating of better than sixty per cent. And Republican mayors run America's two largest cities. The crisis in the conservative movement lies not with its politicians but with its intellectuals. Based mostly in Washington, they have shaped conservatism's national image. For thirty years, they have argued strenuously for a society dominated by capitalism and bourgeois values. Now they have it—and find themselves out of place in this new world.

Modern conservatism was born of despair. In the aftermath of the Great Depression and the Second World War, government intervention in the economy and in society expanded enormously in the United States and Western Europe (not to mention the Communist takeover of Eastern Europe). The Third World embraced anti-capitalist and anti-Western policies with revolutionary fervor. By the fifties, the conflict with the Soviet Union was providing more grist for pessimism. In that decade, it is often

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forgotten, the Soviet Union's economy was growing faster than those of many Western countries, and it was launching satellites, building nuclear bombs, and gaining allies at an impressive pace. In 1955, when William F. Buckley, Jr., founded *National Review* and, with it, modern American conservatism, he opened with the now famous exhortation that his magazine "stands athwart history yelling 'Stop!' "

This, then, is conservatism's dilemma: what to do now that history is going its way? The Cold War is won, and America dominates the world. From Beijing to Buenos Aires, governments are privatizing state-owned companies and dismantling regulations. Proposals that once seemed utopian—school vouchers and privatized pensions, for instance—are being seriously debated in political campaigns. Few think tanks or politicians advocate ambitious new government programs, even in the face of vast surpluses. Government spending has actually declined as a percentage of the gross domestic product, for the first time in nearly twenty years. The two most successful left-of-center politicians in the world, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, routinely cite balancing the budget as their proudest accomplishment.

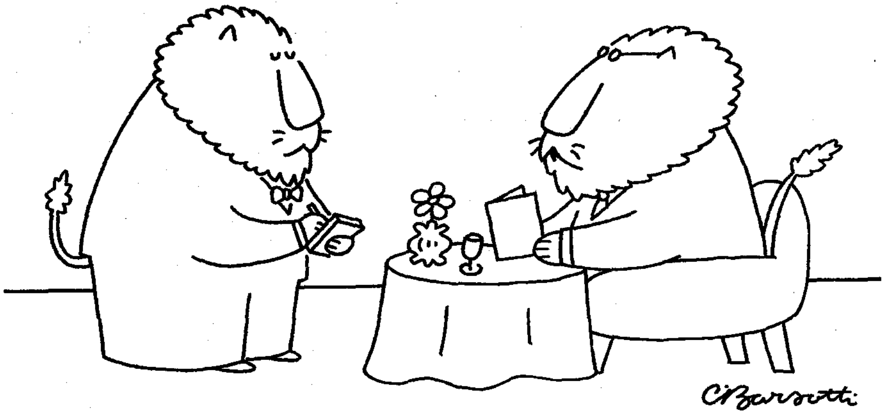
Yet, with so much to cheer about, conservatives still sound morose. For some, this is a matter of habit, but many believe that even though Communism is dead and statism is in retreat, the tide is against them in one important realm. "Having been spared the class revolution that Marx predicted, we have succumbed to the cultural revolution," Gertrude Himmelfarb writes in her most recent book, "One Nation: Two Cultures" (Knopf; $23). A distinguished historian, Himmelfarb has written important histories, biographies, and essays on nineteenth-century England. Lately, though, she has turned her gaze on contemporary America; her last four books have tackled postmodernism in the academy and the fallout from "the sixties."

The sixties hold a special place for neoconservatives. It was the decade that drove them to the right. Liberal intellectuals like Irving Kristol (Himmelfarb's husband) and Norman Podhoretz found themselves dismayed by the direction America was going in—proliferating social programs, ever-increasing government spending, a weakening of resolve in the Cold War, and an assault on traditional institutions and values. The seventies continued the trend with defeat abroad and stagflation and social transformation at home. A generation later, defeat has given way to American hegemony, and stagflation to the new economy, but the social transformation has endured.

Himmelfarb presents a daunting set of facts: between 1960 and 1990, the illegitimacy rate increased sixfold, crime fivefold, unmarried couples with young children sevenfold, one-parent families threefold, families headed by a never married mother twelvefold. The statistics, she continues, "do not tell the whole story. The loss of parental authority, the lack of discipline in the schools (to say nothing of knifings and shootings), the escalating violence and vulgarity on TV, the ready accessibility of pornography and sexual perversions on the Internet, the obscenity and sadism of videos and rap music . . . these too are part of the social pathology of our time." (She was more blunt in an article in *The Weekly Standard* five years ago, writing, "By now, the nature of our institutions has been so radically altered that we find ourselves in a society few conservatives can tolerate, let alone 'delight in.' ")

Nevertheless, the cultural atmosphere is better today than it has been for decades, as Himmelfarb herself now and then acknowledges. Many of the worst trends she cites have slowed, or even reversed course; crime is down, and so are the rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births. Still, compared with forty years ago, things look bad. Himmelfarb places her only hope in what she sees as an ongoing religious revival that is spreading across America. We are one nation but two cultures, she writes, and she hopes that the culture of the Christian Coalition wins out over that of multiculturalism and gender studies.

But, like so much conservative rhetoric these days, Himmelfarb's book pays far too much attention to the increasingly irrelevant world of postmodern liberal-arts studies. Her America is Antioch College writ large. In



"And I'll have that lightly sedated, please."

• •

fact, there is little support in mainstream society today for the kind of nihilism or social and moral experimentation that characterized the late sixties and seventies. There are no equivalents of Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, Gore Vidal, or even George McGovern on the political spectrum today. In the recent primaries, every candidate for the Presidency, Democrat or Republican, spoke of little other than his fondness for the flag, the armed forces, family values, God, and the glories of capitalism. Both Presidential front-runners are born-again Christians. College students today aspire to work twelve-hour days at consulting firms or sixteen-hour days at dot-com startups. The icons of our time are Warren Buffett and Bill Gates.

David Brooks describes this new world in his amusing book "Bobos in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There" (Simon & Schuster; $25). His new new class is a hybrid—he calls its members Bourgeois Bohemians (hence Bobos)—but it's clear which side dominates. Bohemianism, once a passionately serious and anti-capitalist attitude, lingers mostly as a matter of aesthetics: the love of Mexican tiles, Colombian throw rugs, and organic food. The defining feature of the bourgeoisie, materialism, has become the defining feature of our times. The sixties generation is now driven by work, money, and family—particularly children, who have an almost sacred status in today's society. Meanwhile, Brooks writes, "Bob Dylan and Crosby Stills and Nash now play concerts at private conferences hosted by Nomura Securities." The bohemians have become bankers; what greater victory can you ask for?

David Frum presents a nuanced picture of the results of the cultural revolution in "How We Got Here: The Seventies, the Decade That Brought You Modern Life—for Better or Worse" (Basic; $25). Frum points out that the seventies—when most of the shifts in mores actually took place—produced as many virtues as it did vices. The country became far more dynamic and competitive but less loyal and egalitarian (compare the Silicon Valley of the nineties with the Detroit of the sixties); more socially equal but less united and trusting (think of the sagging reputation of government and the explosion in litigation); more honest and authentic but less polite and considerate.

The truly exceptional decade in American history, Frum writes, isn't the sixties or the seventies but the fifties, a period of national unity forged by war, the battle against Communism, and tightly controlled immigration. Frum hopes that some of the lost virtue of those years can be restored, but he recognizes that nostalgia for the fifties is misplaced. He writes:

> The middle decades of the twentieth century were an entirely anomalous period in American history. Never had the state been so strong, never had people submitted as uncomplainingly, never had the country been more economically equal, never had it been more ethnically homogeneous, seldom was

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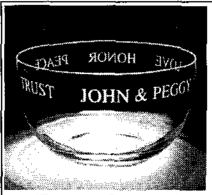

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> its political consensus more overpowering. You can see now why people might pine for those days. But would they pine for them if they remembered more clearly that the top rate of federal income tax was 90 percent . . . Or that the attorney general could wiretap more or less anybody he wanted to . . . [and] to ship a crate of lettuce across the country, a trucker needed permission from a federal regulatory agency.

Most Americans today would accept the case for restoring a measure of civility, standards, and even morality to our sometimes violent, vulgar, and dumbed-down culture. But when conservatives couch that case in fiery terms of condemnation, suggesting that we live in the last days of the Roman Empire (or in even earlier times of decay, as implied in the title of Robert Bork's 1996 book, "Slouching Towards Gomorrah"), they come across simply as reactionaries—nostalgic for a world that cannot and should not be restored. Bob Dole, in a speech at the 1996 Republican Convention that was bizarrely at odds with his long record as a moderate—one that was written by the conservative novelist Mark Helprin—angrily declaimed, "To those who say . . . that America has not been better, I say you're wrong, and I know, because I was there. I have seen it. I remember." Really? Kansas in the nineteen-fifties? Where most women couldn't have careers, minorities were treated as second-class citizens, a few companies and labor unions dominated work, big government was thriving, and the food was lousy? I'll take Gomorrah, thank you.

Francis Fukuyama, in "The Great Disruption" (Free Press; $26), makes the broader structural argument that many of the changes of the sixties and seventies were really the consequences of deep-rooted economic and technological forces. As he sees it, the Western industrial world moved to an information-based economy, in which physical strength became less important, women entered the labor force, being creative became more important than following orders in work life, and birth control became cheap and accessible. The cultural transformation owed more to capitalism than to Allen Ginsberg. How else to explain, Fukuyama asks, the rise of social pathologies in Western countries like Norway, Spain, and New Zealand, which didn't go through a sixties revolution?

Brooks, Frum, and Fukuyama, all conservatives, have, without ever saying so, undermined the right's critique of America's cultural revolution. They show that the transformation of society has produced problems but also progress, and that the two are often linked. Women gained economic power, permanently changing their relationship with men. Communities withered as a dynamic economy spurred people to move often and work harder. Any sensible criticism of the excesses of the sixties and seventies must grapple with the accomplishments of those decades.

Conservatism struck a chord with many when it was "standing athwart history," battling Soviet Communism abroad and statism and cultural nihilism at home. But, having been shaped by these struggles, it is in danger of turning into an oppositional movement, pining for the thrill of the fight. For the last few years, conservative intellectuals have been in search of great causes. And when they could not find them they have infused mundane political battles with the atmosphere of a jihad.

Kristol's pulpit, *The Weekly Standard*, initially tried to turn the social agenda into a war, running dozens of incendiary articles on abortion, homosexuality, secular humanism, and pornography. In January of 1998, Kristol urged a frontal assault on Roe v. Wade, writing that without its overthrow "there will be no conservative future." *The Standard*, *The American Spectator*, and the *Wall Street Journal* all took up the case for impeaching Clinton with a fanaticism that had an air of desperation about it. Most recently, conservatives have gone into a frenzy over the case of Elián Gonzalez, writing passionate denunciations of Cuban Communism which read as if they had been written in 1965.

On foreign policy, *The Standard* has fanned the flames of anti-Chinese hysteria, almost hoping that China will obligingly turn into the next Soviet Empire. *The Standard's* view of the world reads like Robert Bork's view of America. It recently editorialized, "The present moment looks a lot like the late

1970s. Obviously there's no Soviet Union; but . . . our weakness is in certain ways as dangerous today as our weakness was in the late 1970s." Yes, aside from the fact that our mortal enemy is dead, no serious rivals are in sight, our military is larger than those of the next five great powers put together, and our economy the envy of the world—aside from that, it's Saigon in 1975.

None of these attempts to "remoralize" American domestic or foreign policy have worked. Indeed, the public sees through the hypocrisy of conservatives suddenly embracing extravagant independent-counsel investigations (which they have opposed for twenty years) or the rights of children to separate from their parents (which they denounced in the 1992 Republican platform). So Kristol, at least, has moved to another idea: "national greatness." He and his colleague David Brooks have argued for a conservatism that is respectful of the state. They make an intelligent case for a more positive view of government and for the revival of a kind of old-fashioned nationalism. For similar reasons, many neoconservatives have praised John McCain, who symbolizes American patriotism and speaks its language eloquently.

But it remains unclear what, precisely, "national-greatness conservatism" would do. (Most conservatives disagree with McCain's policies for reform.) Brooks has suggested that the government build more monuments like the Library of Congress, which symbolize "the greatness of the American experiment." Fine, but was America energized by the completion of the gargantuan Ronald Reagan Building, in Washington? Should we follow François Mitterrand's flights of fancy and build "great works" all over the capital? It's ironic that conservatives, in their search for meaning, now want to make America more like France.

The national-greatness conservatives' model for the future of the Republican Party is Theodore Roosevelt, who employed both energetic government and nationalist rhetoric. There's much to admire in Roosevelt, but in his era the Democratic Party was the party of small government, states' rights, and free trade; the Republicans were for

BRIEFLY NOTED

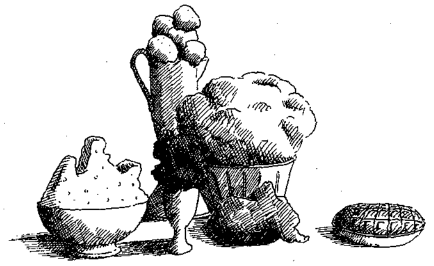
From Dawn to Decadence: Five Hundred Years of Western Cultural Life, 1500 to the Present, *by Jacques Barzun (HarperCollins; $36).* An immense, ambitious panorama of the period that historians call "modern" and that the venerable author believes is ending. Barzun writes with unfailing, stylish lucidity and enlivens his vast tale with ingenious devices, such as entering into the preoccupations of the past through a particular time and place (Venice in 1650, say, or Chicago in 1895). He also picks up recurring themes, such as "emancipation" and "primitivism," and so offers a sense of continuity as well as of change. Readers may disagree with some of Barzun's assessments (he's very unsympathetic to the last fifty years), but they will find him unfailingly persuasive in his enthusiasms (read him on English madrigals!).

Wild Decembers, *by Edna O'Brien (Houghton Mifflin; $24).* "Where lieth the seat of the affections, in the body or in the soul?" This question is posed by a lawyer to Breege Brennan and her brother Joseph, just before Joseph becomes entangled in a feud over land that will bring the world as the Brennans know it crashing down around them. The author is one of our great storytellers, and, if this novel isn't quite up to her best, her answers to the lawyer's query are so lush and intent, so deeply felt, that the hasty elements of her plot are easily forgiven. O'Brien's meditation on the ache of desire—whether for love, or for turf, or for what in the thick of things looks like justice—is both a lesson and a revelation.

At End of Day, *by George V. Higgins (Harcourt; $24).* Like Henry Higgins, the late George V. was enamored of the spoken word. But rather than trying to improve the accent and remove the slang of his subjects in the nasty backwaters of the Boston underworld, he devoted himself to capturing the rhythms and rasps of the local tongue. The challenge of following the author into the linguistic thickets of his cops and hoods is a fitting analogue to the moral challenges that his law-enforcement figures face while cracking a drug ring, dealing with loan sharks, and trying to contain, if not detain, several mobsters. Nothing about the book—Higgins's last; he died in 1999—is easy, but it is all worth the effort.

The Collaborator, *by Alice Kaplan (Chicago; $25).* Robert Brasillach, France's most famous fascist journalist, frequently used his columns during the Occupation to denounce Jews and Resistance sympathizers. After the Liberation, he was one of the very few writers executed for treason, and he has been considered a martyr by the French far right ever since. This gripping reconstruction of his trial—with portraits of judge and jurors and accounts of the defense and prosecution speeches—shows that Brasillach was perhaps unlucky to be executed; on the other hand, Kaplan is dismissive of any attempts to rehabilitate the reputation of what the prosecutor called a "magnificent talent, which was useless because it wasn't merciful."

The World's Wife, *by Carol Ann Duffy (Faber & Faber; $22).* These jaunty dramatic monologues by the celebrated Scottish poet set history on edge. In thirty poems rife with rhythmic extravagance, she offers us the past as it could have been, in the voices of such women as Frau Freud, Mrs. Sisyphus, and Queen Kong, along with the remarkable Mrs. Faust, who announces, "When I got ill, / it hurt like hell. / I bought a kidney / with my credit card, / then I got well. / I keep Faust's secret still—." Duffy's project recalls the poems of the Americans Ai and Pamela White Hadas, but the élan of this volume sets it apart, the characters (and poems) triumphant.



federal intervention in the economy and high tariffs. Roosevelt spoke with complete credibility in advocating higher taxes, stronger government, and the regulation of business. Were Republicans to do so today, they would be reversing positions they've held for seventy-five years.

I was a fiery young conservative in college, in the early eighties, and I admit that there's much that I miss about those years. Politics and ideas held center stage. Those of us who were politically active felt that the debates of the moment—on the Sandinistas, welfare policy, missiles in Europe—had crucial consequences. We thought we were arguing about the direction of history. Much of that feeling was probably the usual undergraduate self-importance, but those were tense, exciting times. When Caspar Weinberger visited the campus, he had an audience of a thousand, while a hundred protesters shouted outside and, in the hall, a dozen hecklers chanted, "Deterrence is a lie!"

I recently asked the students who now invite speakers to my alma mater who their biggest draws were last semester. (In my day, they were Weinberger, McGovern, and Buckley.) The winners were Alan Dershowitz and Michael Bloomberg. We live in earnest, bourgeois times shaped not by political ideology but by the new economy. No pundit commands the attention of society the way Walter Lippmann did in 1960, or William Buckley did in 1980 (except maybe Abby Joseph Cohen, the soothsayer of the stock market). Intellectuals still hurl polemics at one another from their perches in think tanks, at magazines, and on op-ed pages. But mainstream culture isn't paying much attention.

Politicians who are comfortable in this new world flourish, most notably the Republican governors. They are pragmatic, reform-minded, good-government types. They've cut taxes for six years running—Michigan's John Engler has done it thirty-one times—but they also pride themselves on services. They are tough on crime and welfare, but accommodating on abortion and homosexuality. They are willing to reëxamine parts of conservative orthodoxy, and to cast aside debris from another era, as George Pataki, of New York, did recently when he proposed tough gun-control laws. They compromise because they can make lasting progress only with bipartisan support. (Only half of the Republican governors have majorities in both their state houses.)

Conservative intellectuals have never liked such politicians, dismissing them as compromisers who don't have the courage to stand up to the media and to liberal élites. Before George W. Bush's poll numbers stunned everyone into silence last winter, most of the conservative writers and pundits I spoke with had utter contempt for him. He was soft, they said; he was his father's son; he was the wrong Bush brother (Jeb is more hard-line). Rudolph Giuliani, George Pataki, Richard Riordan, and Christine Todd Whitman are all subjected to the same acid test, and routinely fail.

Whoever wins the Presidency—Bush or Gore—will strike ideological purists as a sordid compromise. But he will probably govern the way people today want to be governed: from the center, incrementally, and through consensus. This, too, is a victory for conservatism, properly understood. As the English philosopher Michael Oakeshott has pointed out, conservatism is not an ideology that aims at constructing an ideal society. (What would an ideal conservative society be?) It is, instead, a temperament or a disposition, one that values stability and continuity and shuns revolutions and radical change. In his celebrated essay "On Being Conservative" Oakeshott writes that conservatism seeks to "use and enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is the present rather than what was or what may be. . . . To be conservative then is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss." George W. Bush probably wouldn't put it in exactly those words, but he might well agree. ◆

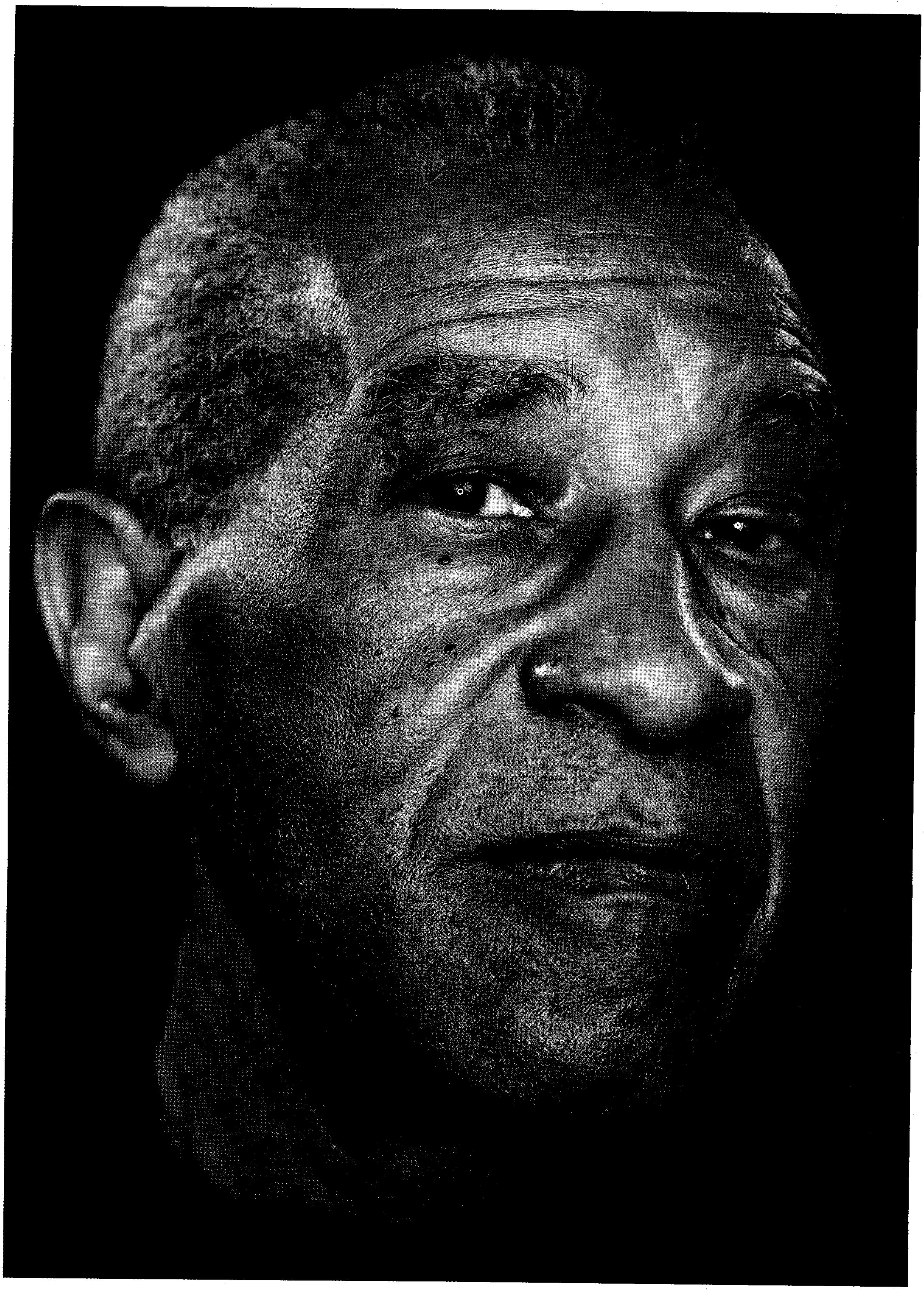
SHOWCASE BY
MARTIN SCHOELLER

TO THE MAX

When he was a teen-ager, Max Roach would carry his drum kit from Brooklyn to jam with the older musicians at Minton's Playhouse or Monroe's Uptown House. He was a drummer of great power and variety: his cymbals sizzled; he dropped bomblike accents on his bass drum. At eighteen, he replaced Kenny Clarke in Coleman Hawkins's small group and began to play the unconventional jazz that came to be known as bebop. Lean, taut, possessed of ferocious concentration, Max drove many of the extraordinary bebop groups, which included Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, and Miles Davis. For five years, he played in a quintet with Clifford Brown, the most brilliant of the post-Dizzy trumpet players. Brown was killed in an automobile accident in 1956, when he was twenty-six. Max told me once that he never got over it.

A musician of wide, restless tastes and high intelligence, Max refused to repeat himself, or others. In 1960, he composed and recorded "We Insist!: Freedom Now Suite," which, with joy and lyricism—and anger—expressed the African-American experience. It was an assault on liberal banalities and the psychic heritage of slavery, and something new in American music. In the following decades, he recorded with the free-form jazzmen Anthony Braxton, Cecil Taylor, and Archie Shepp, taught at the University of Massachusetts, made music for movies and theatre, worked concerts with a gospel group, and collaborated with Amiri Baraka on a "bopera" about Bumpy Johnson. Now, at the age of seventy-six, Max performs with his own groups, including M'BOOM, a percussion ensemble, and the So What Brass Quintet. His presence is as powerful now as it was when he first took the A train uptown from Brooklyn, mad for music.

—*Pete Hamill*



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BOOKS

NIGHT MUSIC

Rose Tremain sees light in the dark.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Rose Tremain, the author of the celebrated "Restoration," is not through with the seventeenth century yet. Her new novel, "Music & Silence" (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; $25), opens in Copenhagen, in 1629, on a winter night as dark as the void. To Peter Claire, an English lutenist who has come to take up a post in the orchestra of King Christian IV, the blackness seems "as though it emanated from within him, as if he had finally crossed the threshold of his own absence of hope." But soon a lamp is lighted. The King, weighed down by Denmark's troubles, looks on young Claire and sees the face of an angel, like the angels his grandmother told him about when he was a child—blessed spirits who "rode about on the clouds" and at Christmas filled his shoes with gold and silver. Claire, for his part, is glad that he can comfort someone.

Hope, once kindled, spreads like a flash fire. Kirsten, the King's beautiful consort, lays plans to trade in her ugly husband—he worships her, takes her to his garden and bids the flowers look on her—for a German count who, to her great satisfaction, beats her with silken whips during their love jousts. In Jutland, a widower, Johann Tilsen, looks at his new housekeeper, Magdalena, in her red skirts, and feels the blood in his veins start to move again. In Norway, the people of a little village are told that there is silver in their hills, and they rejoice, imagining stocked larders instead of turnips every night. In Ireland, a young earl, Johnnie O'Fingal, wakes up from a dream in which he has heard an unearthly song—the voice of Paradise, it seems to him—and sits down at his virginal, determined to recapture it. Back in Copenhagen, Peter Claire claps eyes on Emilia Tilsen, daughter of Johann, and is never the same again.

Love or money or salvation—it drives them all crazy, and Tremain's language follows their hearts' flights. Even Kirsten, a slut if ever there was one, breaks into poetry, likening love to "certain species of birds that do hide themselves only in banana trees or in the freezing air above the clouds." Everyone is exalted—and everyone, in the end, disappointed. Johnnie O'Fingal, after years of trying to remember the dream song, finds out that it was not a message from Heaven but a tune by Ferrabosco that he probably heard at a dinner party. (He dies insane as a result.) King Christian loses the ravishing Kirsten; he must settle for a woman with three chins, who loves him, however. Peter Claire and Emilia are almost aged with woe by the time they get together.

It all ends kindly, but with no mitigation of life's horror. At one point, a little boy, Marcus Tilsen, watches his loathsome stepmother—Magdalena, of the red skirts—give birth by a lakeside. He doesn't know what is happening to her. All he knows is what he sees and hears: screams, blood. Afterward, he stands alone on the shore and spies a pink mess, "a blood-filled fungus" (the placenta), in the water. "It bobs and floats like a giant lily, and all around it is a frenzy of tiny fishes, nibbling at it and feeding." He thinks, "I will see this thing in my nightmares." I do not know of a nastier moment in fiction. Even tenderness, in this story, is braided with cruelty. Emilia, Marcus's sister, takes him on her knee—she loves him, she will save his life—and whispers in his ear, "You killed my mother, Marcus." He did. Their mother died giving birth to him. That's why they have Magdalena.

"Music & Silence" is very contemporary in its preoccupation with history and in its "appropriations." Shakespeare is invoked repeatedly. The name of Claire, the "angel," comes from Hardy. The Brothers Grimm are there, and not just in the wicked stepmother;

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the language sounds like a fairy tale grown up. In the concoction of gleaming metaphor from the humblest of things, from chairs and pies, and in the variety of characters and stories—there's a chicken named Gerda who has her troubles, too—one hears Chaucer's voice. Above all, we feel the impress of the seventeenth-century world, a world that its creatures thought they understood yet looked on with awe, born of the rise of commerce and the explorations of the New World. The King dreams of paper factories; Marcus dreams of buffalo.

But the novel wears its learning lightly. Indeed, it seems less a novel than a fable. Its protagonists, Claire and Emilia, are icons of virtue, like paintings on a church wall. Characters are doubles of each other; things happen twice, three times, to different people. There are buried treasures, mad revels. At the New Year's carnival, 1630, the citizens of Copenhagen paint their faces and "dance on the patient rumps of their cart-horses. They take it into their heads that they can climb to the high pinnacles of the city and fly." In the morning, they gather up the dead and then go sit in their rooms and wonder "why it is they are alive in this time and what it is that God conceals from them." The book partakes of our recent apocalypticism.

The controlling metaphor is music. It is Claire's lute playing, not just his face, that makes him seem an angel to the King. In the first pages of the book, the two men agree that music is "the human soul, speaking without words," but what is it speaking of, they ask—reason or passion? On this Platonic question the whole narrative turns. The structure is musical, too. In its jumping from subplot to subplot, and in the doubling of characters and events, the novel imitates harmony, counterpoint. It has fine, brassy climaxes and, in the end, a gentle diminuendo, in which the King, his passions spent, imagines building an observatory so that he can climb up next to the moon and "hear the one sound from which chaos is absent, which is the sound of the universe itself." This is followed by a racy little coda, spoken by Kirsten, now in exile, but with a new lover. (Two, actually.) And so, like music, the book gives us both the ache and the deliverance. ♦

Love or money or salvation—it drives all the characters crazy, and Tremain's language follows their hearts' flights.

GLADYS PERINT PALMER

MUSICAL EVENTS

THE MAGIC MOUNTAIN

Surviving the CD avalanche.

BY ALEX ROSS

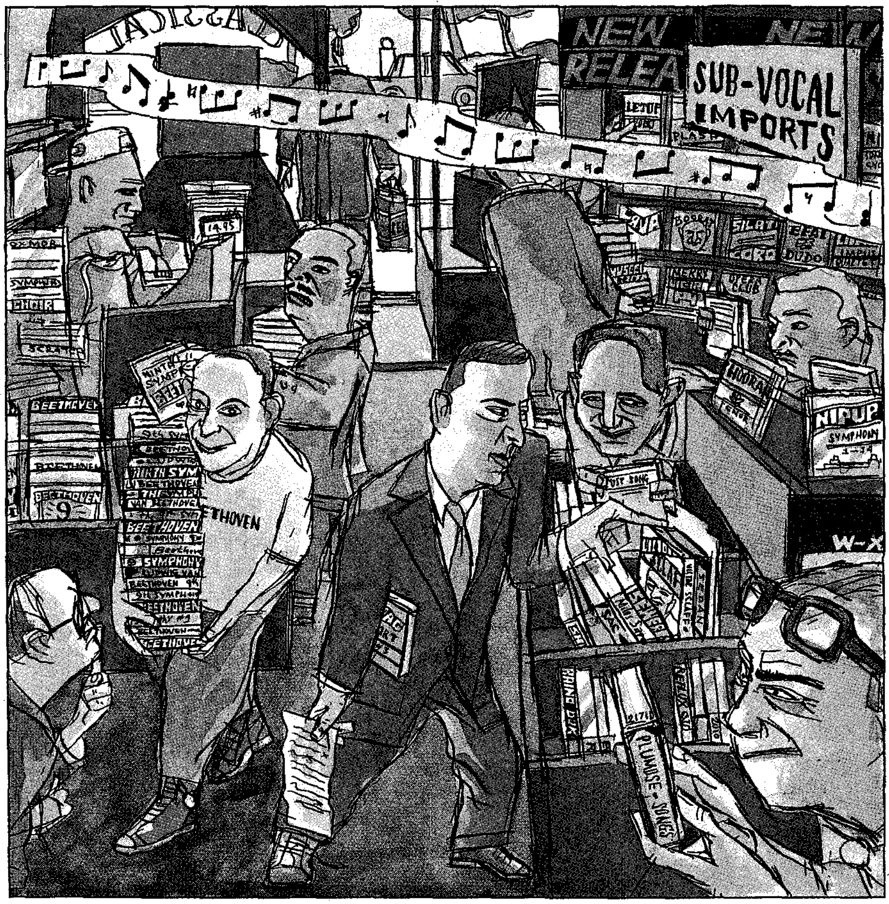
Classical-record collectors are among the oddest subspecies of the family of man. They come in two types—the completist and the obscurantist. The completists gather every known recording of a given composer or artist: they own fifty versions of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, ten of them under the direction of Wilhelm Furtwängler, and usually maintain that the slowest, strangest, screechiest-sounding of the lot is the most ineffably sublime. (Add points for any performance in which Allied bombs can be heard exploding outside the hall.) The obscurantists, by contrast, have no patience for a composer as painfully overexposed as Beethoven. He's fine, they say, but the symphonies of Méhul are just as interesting. Enough Bach and Brahms, they say; the time has come for Zelenka, Zemlinsky, and Zandonai. There are even people who are both completist and obscurantist. You might glimpse them outside Tower Records, blinking in the sun, as they lug bags of Callas and Tallis into the subway.

Record stores are curious, unmusical places. They bear no trace of the collective excitement that greets even the most humdrum live concert. Instead, they are laced with consumerist anxiety and loneliness. Collectors hover over stacks of eight or ten CDs, trying to winnow them down to six or seven. Amateurs stare helplessly at a sea of Sibelius. Someone's recording of the Bartók Concerto for Orchestra is playing overhead, and the performance, no matter how brilliant or historic, fails to deliver the tremor of drama which any ragtag ensemble creates for an audience.

Recordings, in short, are fetish objects, sublimations of a solitary, mostly male desire. But they still have a crucial role to play in musical life. They supply snapshots of young artists, open up neglected areas of the repertory, preserve the great voices of the past. The well-publicized ills of the classical-recording industry are a matter of corporate mismanagement. Major companies, such as Universal and BMG, may be gutting their classical divisions, but independent labels like Chandos, Arabesque, Harmonia Mundi, ASV, and Hyperion are filling the shelves with riveting oddities. Lately, with the concert season winding down, I've been catching up on new releases, and I have sought out the ones that seem necessary, rather than those that fill a gap on a fanatic's shelves. Amid an assortment of the eccentric, the dreary, and the superfluous, I've found more than a few disks that seem entirely fresh, with the glow of live performance still lingering in them.

A Teldec set of the Beethoven symphonies, with Daniel Barenboim conducting the Berlin Staatskapelle, shows everything that is wrong with the record business at the moment. It signifies mainly that Barenboim is a powerful figure who has the clout to get this kind of project made. His Beethoven has its inspired moments, especially in the heavy-hitting sections of the Fifth, Seventh, and Ninth, but it lacks the interpretive authority and consistency that would justify the expenditure of eighty-five dollars. The account of the "Eroica" Symphony is typical: the climaxes have a fine stamping force, but the ceremonial crescendos in the first movement sound curiously flat and expressionless at the outset. In the funeral march, Barenboim's creamy legato and heaving rubato fall short of the desired ultra-Romantic magnificence—they remain a collection of imitative tics.

The trouble with recordings of the standard repertory is that interpreters must now compete with a seemingly infinite archive of historical performances. Many of these are for obsessive-compulsives only: I've tried and failed to



CD stores are a labyrinth of the old and the new, the essential and the superfluous.

comprehend the CD cult of the late Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache, whose chief distinction was that he played everything more slowly than anyone else. But other historical offerings are deserving of the name. Take an intensely lyrical performance of Schubert's "Little" A-Major Sonata, on a disk of rare recordings by the great German pianist Walter Gieseking, on the Arbiter label. The date of the document—January 23, 1945—is unsettling; this is a pristine tape of a German radio broadcast, and one imagines Hitler tuning in for relaxation after a hard day of world destruction. Yet the ease and eloquence of the playing seem to come from no particular point in time. It could be yesterday, or another century. This is one of the loveliest—and eeriest—piano records ever made.

Interpreters who go up against the likes of Gieseking should speak only when they have something arresting to say. Günter Wand's recent rendition of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, on RCA, makes the cut. Wand, at the age of eighty-eight, is vastly experienced, but he does not sound tired. His way with every phrase makes one sit up and take notice. Another new disk, on the budget label Naxos, is noteworthy not only for its excellence but also for its price. Peter Hill, a little-heralded but greatly gifted English pianist, has made a recital of works by Berg, Schoenberg, and Webern. For seven dollars, you can learn the basics of the music of the Second Viennese School, in performances that are exceptional for their clarity and grace.

Recordings have not only created a canon of great performances of the mainstream repertory but have also changed the repertory itself. Turn-of-the-century and twentieth-century composers have tended to find a following among collectors before gaining a foothold in concert halls, and some have won over live audiences in due course. The symphonies of Mahler and Shostakovich, for example, first seemed to come into focus for a larger public when they were presented in the sonic luxury of LPs. Early music has also become a huge cottage industry: composers like Ockeghem, Taverner, and Biber have come in from the cold and become household names in certain households (the ones with a homemade harpsichord in the living room).

One composer who is looking bullish in the CD market is Ferruccio Busoni, the turn-of-the-century pianist, theorist, and visionary. Composers have lately been rediscovering Busoni's music as an alternative path through the thickets of early modernism; his eclectic, evasive style now seems like a kind of "third way" between tradition and abstraction. Two de-luxe, major-label projects suggest that Busoni's stock may rise even further. Daniel Barenboim has proved his usefulness by leading his Berlin State Opera forces in a live recording of Busoni's first opera, "Die Brautwahl," on Teldec. The story, a whirlwind of hocus-pocus adapted from an E. T. A. Hoffmann tale, lacks a dramatic center, but the score ravishes the ear with catchy ditties, comic set pieces, shimmering orchestral textures, and a general aura of midnight magic. Meanwhile, Busoni's masterpiece, "Doktor Faust," is newly available on Erato, under the direction of Kent Nagano. The title role is taken by Dietrich Henschel, a compelling young baritone of the school of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. On these disks, Busoni's art needs no special pleading: it casts an immediate and lasting spell.

Another trend of the CD era has been the creation of encyclopedias in sound—every last work by Mozart, every last piano recording by Arthur Rubinstein. Perhaps the most heroic of such efforts is a thirty-seven-volume survey of Schubert songs on the Hyperion label. The project is almost single-handedly the work of the pianist Graham Johnson, who has accompanied all the recordings in the cycle, and has also displayed his expertise in thousands of pages of program notes. There may now be no better way into Schubert's world. Among recent installments, Volume 33, devoted to the songs of Schubert's teens, stands out. In it, Schubert's voice emerges unmistakably from a chrysalis of Baroque and classical styles. A sudden shift from minor to major in the long piano introduction to "Lebenstraum," the first selection on the disk, gives the game away at once: at the age of thirteen, Schubert had already discovered how to shroud major keys in melancholy. Recent volumes of the series have drawn the best of contemporary lieder singers, among them Ian Bostridge, Christine Schäfer, and Matthias Goerne. Brigitte Fassbaender's early entry, "Songs of Death," deserves to be enshrined as a classic.

Not only the famous are given the royal treatment on CD. As a collector with obscurantist tendencies, I've been fascinated by a series of recordings, on the BIS label, of the weird Icelandic composer Jón Leifs. He lived from 1899 to 1968, and established, in the nineteen-twenties, a technique of sound-sculpture which places him in the company of such mavericks as Edgard Varèse and Silvestre Revueltas. "Hekla," the most recent entry in the series, is an onslaught of dissonant chord blocks, whiplash percussion, and jagged orchestration. Into the mayhem are thrown austere, chantlike lines derived from Icelandic folk music. It helps Leifs's unlikely cause that the Iceland Symphony plays at a world-class level, and that BIS supplies shatteringly vivid sound.

If you measure the quality of a recording by the number of times you play it, then I have to give a prize to a two-disk collection of Ravel chamber music, on Arabesque. Among the selections are the Piano Trio, the Violin Sonata, the Sonata for Violin and Cello, and the "Sonate Posthume"; the players are Joseph Kalichstein, Jaime Laredo, and Sharon Robinson. These are expert, heartfelt performances, but I can't rationally explain why I've become addicted to them. Perhaps I simply came across them at the right moment, in the right Ravelian mood. As Schubert was the master of tragic happiness, Ravel was the master of happy sadness. The works on this set add up to a way of looking at the world, a philosophy of life, which is no less imposing, in its sly and tender way, than the nine symphonies of Beethoven. What it is, exactly, I can't tell you. ♦

BEN KATCHOR

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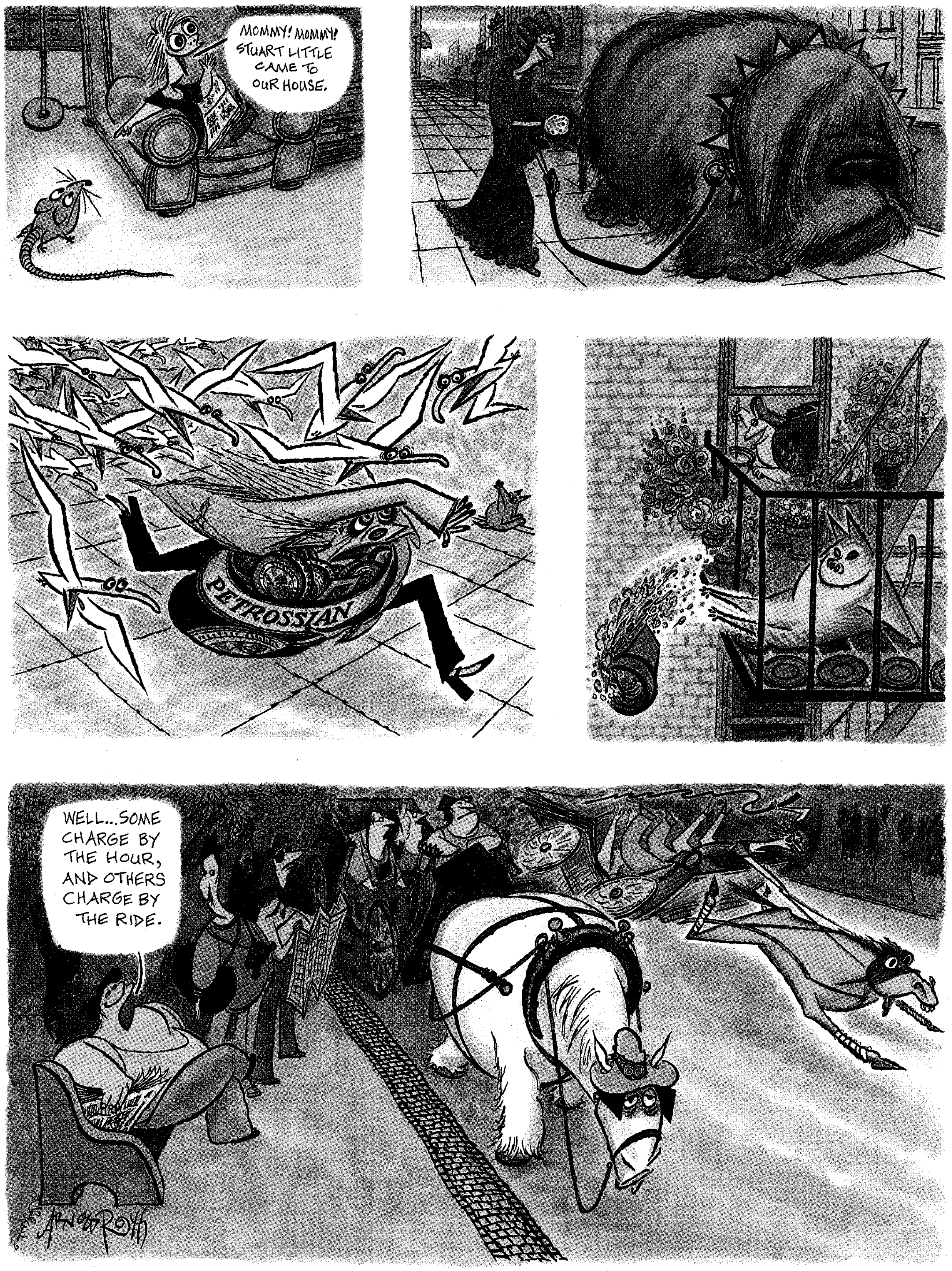
ANIMAL CITY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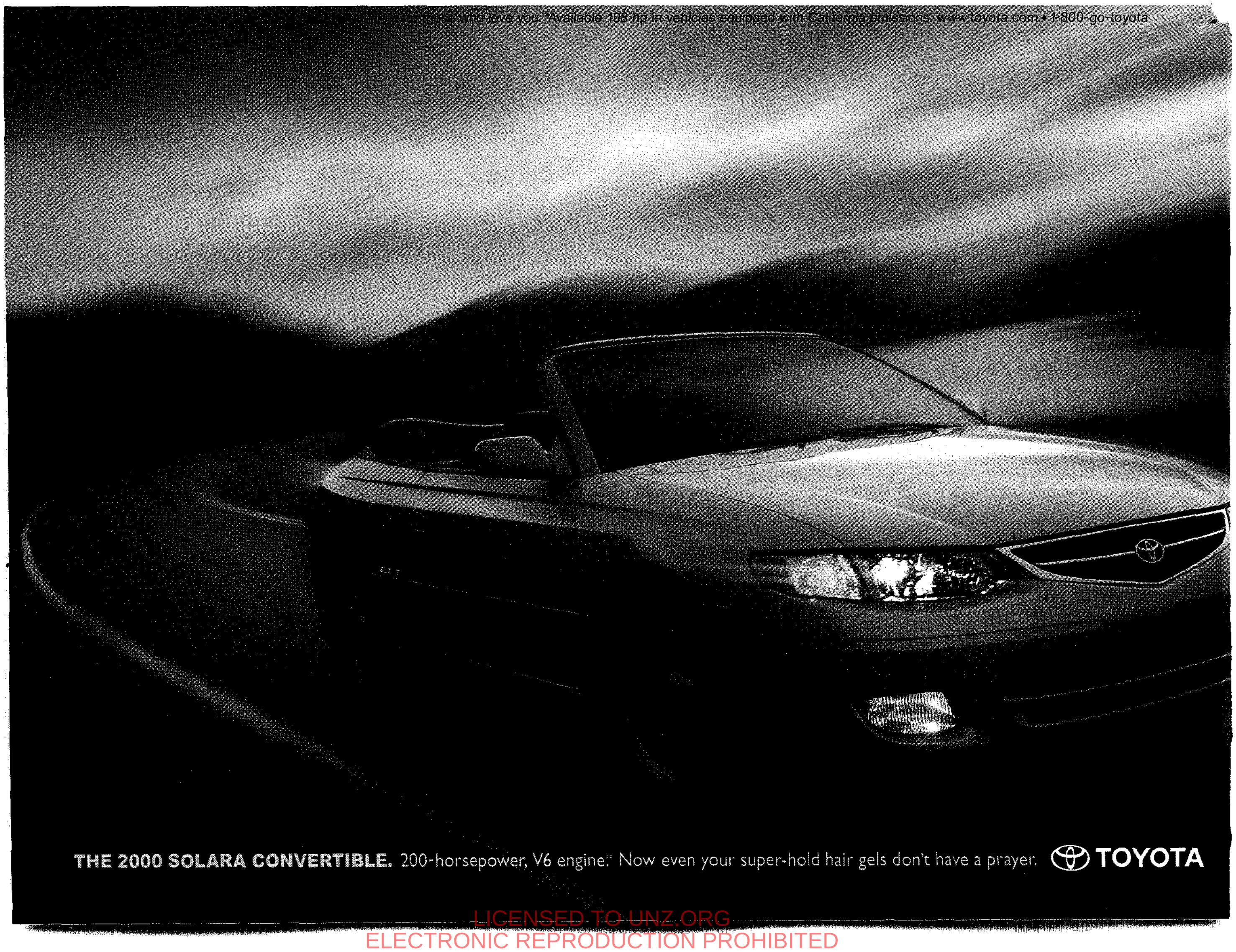
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